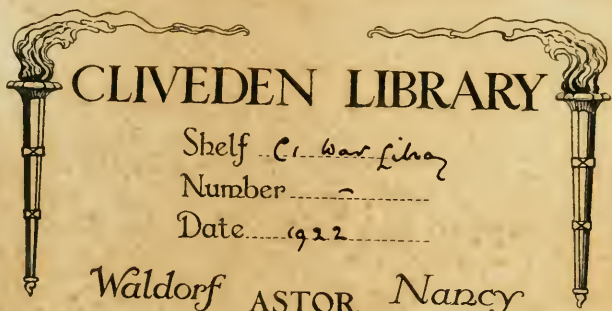






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BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN THE  
NEARER EAST

*WORKS BY EDMUND DANE*

BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN THE NEARER  
EAST. VOL. I. THE DAYS OF ADVER-  
SITY.

BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN THE NEARER  
EAST. VOL. II. THE TIDE OF  
VICTORY.

BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN AFRICA AND  
THE PACIFIC. 1914-1918.

LONDON : HODDER AND STOUGHTON

# BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN THE NEARER EAST 1914—1918

*From the Outbreak of War with Turkey  
to the Armistice*

WITH 30 MAPS AND PLANS

BY

EDMUND DANE

*Military Correspondent of the "Westminster Gazette"; Author of  
"Hacking Through Belgium," "The Battle of the Rivers,"  
"The Battles in Flanders," &c.*

VOL. II

THE TIDE OF VICTORY

HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
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## PREFACE

WHEN in recognition of his priceless services in Syria Field Marshal Allenby, early in October 1919, was honoured with the Freedom of the City of London, his operations were spoken of as a classic example of the military art. The description was just. It is, however, a description applicable with equal justice to the operations of General Maude, and his successor General Marshall, in Mesopotamia, to the operations in the Balkans under the supreme command of General Franchet d'Esperey, and to the strategy and tactics, alike in defence and attack, directed by General Diaz in Italy. In Mesopotamia and in Syria the main burden was borne by British troops; in the Balkans and in Italy they played a part subordinate indeed, but useful to the Allies and honourable to their own renown in arms.

It was fortunate for the Allies opposed to the Pan-Germanic Confederacy that in all these theatres of hostilities they discovered and entrusted their affairs in the field to leaders of genius. The dictum that it is generals who win or lose battles is one the Great War has but served increasingly to confirm. And the reason is not far to seek. The methods of a man of genius are always sane and simple. More surely than men of less calibre he follows the line of least resistance, and, certain in his judgment and clear as to his aims, applies his mind to those details of preparation and administration which spell endurance, efficiency, and sustained moral. East as well as West the Allies had to deal with a skilful, resourceful, and above all determined foe.

They not only as time went on better appreciated the supreme value of leadership in war, but the necessity, not less indispensable, of complete preparation and sound administration. The lesson of the Days of Adversity was the danger of entrusting rather to mechanism than to mind, and the failure which attends crudity and haste. By 1916, and not a little owing to the serious checks met with in the East, that lesson had been brought home. Then, slowly at first, but steadily, the tide turned.

Here the flow of the tide is followed in the succession of events. The first decisive breach in the hostile front occurred in Mesopotamia. It was emphasised by the Turkish-German *débâcle* in Syria. Then in quick succession came the Bulgarian rout in the Balkans and the Austrian overthrow in Italy. The wind-up was Marshall's brilliant victory at Kalaat Shergat.

Various personal and other narratives of one or another of these campaigns have appeared, and few are without their interest. The aim in these pages has been to set out faithfully the teachings which the campaigns embody and to elucidate their relationship, and the reader must judge as to how far that aim has been fulfilled.

E. D.

London, Oct. 1919.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE SALONICA AND EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGNS OF 1916

Strategical reasons for the Allied occupation of Salonica—Belated attempt to aid Serbia—The rôle of Bulgaria—German influences at Athens—Proposed Allied junction with the Serbian army impracticable—Organisation of the Salonica position—Repulse of the Bulgarians—Situation at the beginning of 1916—Surrender of the Struma pass—Enforcement of Greek demobilisation—Formation of a Greek Provisional Government in Macedonia and the islands—Abdication of Constantine—The Allied autumn offensive of 1916—Capture of Kamakchalan and Monastir—Political and strategical consequences—The Senussi of Sollum—His hostility—War declared against him—Operations on the Western Egyptian frontier—Action at Beit Hussein—Battle of Gebel Medwa—Defeat of the Senussi's forces at Halazin—British advance upon Sollum and reoccupation of that place—The exploit of the Armoured Car Detachment—Close of the Western Egyptian campaign—Renewal of enemy attacks in Sinai—The second German-Turkish Expedition—Battle at Mahemdia.

EARLY in October, 1915, the 10th Division, under the command of Sir B. Mahon, withdrawn from Suvla, had been ordered to and had landed at Salonica. There two divisions of the French Eastern Expeditionary Force had preceded them. A third French division shortly afterwards arrived. The French troops were commanded by General Sarrail, an officer who had proved his brilliant ability in the operations round Verdun.

Events in the Balkans had dictated this step. After having, unaided, repelled two attacks by Austria, the Serbians and Montenegrins found themselves in the autumn of 1915 called upon to face, not merely a combined German-Austrian offensive, but an attack by Bulgaria. Born fighters as their peoples were, this

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ordeal was too much for minor States already severely tried in the crucible of war.

The close of 1915 was for the Allied Powers in the East the darkest hour of the conflict. Even if early enough it had been perceived that the Serbo-Greek alliance was the keystone of the political arch, both as regards the Balkans and the Levant as a whole, the course taken by the war in Russia had suddenly emphasised the importance of rendering aid to the Serbians. Certainly statesmen neither in London nor at Paris can justly be accused of failing to foresee the conduct of the Russian Minister of War, General Soukominoff, which, leaving the Russian armies without munitions, had compelled them to evacuate Poland and the Baltic Provinces. On the other hand, it had been open to Allied statesmen either to look upon the Serbo-Greek alliance as a compact merely concerning two minor States, or to view it as having a much wider ambit. The latter assuredly was the view which prevailed alike at Berlin and at Vienna and the view which guided the policy of the Central Powers. It was by no accident that the War broke out as a quarrel between Austria and Serbia. With this compact between Serbia and Greece supported and affirmed, and the eventual adhesion of Rumania assured, the Allied Powers held the diplomatic situation in the Balkans in the hollow of their hand. Though Bulgaria had entered into a treaty, supposed to be secret, with Germany and Austria, that would have mattered little given the united support of the Serbians and the Greeks.

The Allied Powers, however, had allowed King Constantine to treat the compact with Serbia as naught, and the Serbians had been left in isolation. Those proceedings, added to the advance of the German and Austrian armies in Russia and the non-success of the Allied Expedition to Gallipoli, had encouraged the ruling clique in Bulgaria, headed by Tsar Ferdinand, to throw off disguise. An attempt had been made by the British Foreign Office, in whose hands the matter had been left, to secure Bulgarian neutrality. But

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there was between the Court at Athens and that at Sofia a close understanding, and the hesitant attitude of the Allied Powers towards Constantine doomed British negotiations at Sofia to futility. When, at length, action could no longer be postponed if the Serbians were not finally to be crushed, the Allied forces in the Levant were locked up in Gallipoli. Their treaty rights gave France, Great Britain, and Russia, as Guardian Powers, authority to land troops upon Greek territory should it be threatened. Evidently by a defeat of Serbia it might be. They availed themselves therefore of their authority to send troops to Salonica.

The instructions to the Salonica force were to advance into Serbia and open up communication with the Serbian army, and there was apparently an agreement with the Greek Government that if such a junction proved to be impracticable the Allied troops were to be withdrawn. The junction intended did prove to be impracticable, and on several grounds. In the first place, the arrival of the Allied troops at Salonica was for such a purpose belated. By that time, after a resistance which for sheer heroism has never been surpassed, the Serbians had been overwhelmed. During two months they had struggled against impossible odds. The aid of the greater Allied Powers was not forthcoming until the last stage of this unequal conflict. By then those of the Serbians who had survived it—scorning to lay down their arms—the fathers with their boys by their side—were tramping the long miles over the mountains towards the Adriatic amid the rigours of a Balkan winter. They were all that was left of the flower and manhood of their nation.

The proposed junction with the Serbians again was impracticable because the three French divisions told off to effect it were totally insufficient. The single weak British Division transferred to Salonica had assigned to it the duty of covering the French right while the operation of pushing up the valley of the Vardar was being carried out. But the chief function of the Bulgarians in this Balkan campaign had been to thrust in

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between the Serbians and Salonica. The line of the Vardar is long, and to attempt to hold it against hostile forces at least three times as numerous was out of the question.

Here once more there had been uncertainty. If a mistake had been made in embarking prematurely upon the Expedition to Gallipoli in place of throwing troops into Serbia by way of Salonica, which might have been done at the outset of the war and might have saved the Serbo-Greek compact, discouraging the intrigues at Athens at the same time, another mistake was now committed in withdrawing so much of the Dardanelles Force to Egypt. Both these mistakes had arisen from an exaggerated estimate of the capacity of the Turks to attack that Protectorate. The original plea put forward for the Expedition to Gallipoli had been that it would divert such a Turkish attack. Adequate and timely support of the Serbians, however, would have done more to limit Turkish resources, and to hasten the issue of the Eastern campaigns than any other measure. No sufficient consideration seems to have been given to the difficulty confronting any force having to cross the Sinai desert without command of the sea. It was supposed that this difficulty might be overcome by means of rail transit. But Turkey, isolated, was utterly unequal to any enterprise of the kind, and the main problem clearly was to isolate Turkey. The Expedition to Gallipoli was the wrong way of attacking the problem. It was the worst possible strategy. Allowing themselves to be impressed by reports of the 250,000 Turkish troops massed at Damascus for the purposes of an expedition against Egypt, the British Cabinet, though a vigorous effort even at the eleventh hour might have changed the situation in the Balkans, had let Serbia go.

But though belated, the landing of an Allied force at Salonica had important results both politically and strategically. It prevented hostile troops from seizing the great port ; by occupying and diverting the enemy's attention it rendered feasible the re-equipment of what

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was left of the Serbian army, transferred for that purpose from the mainland to Corfu; not least, it altered radically the situation which from this time confronted the predominant pro-German clique at Athens. To all intents the free Constitution of Greece, set up under the ægis of the Guardian Powers, had been suspended. If in name still a Constitutional ruler, Constantine had become, in fact, absolute. The Greek Ministry had been reduced to his puppets. There had appeared the political phenomenon, already familiar in the history of Prussia during the first half of the nineteenth century, of a nominal Cabinet possessing only the shadow of authority, and of a secret and unavowed Court Council exercising all the actual functions of Government.

And the manner in which those functions were exercised left not the slightest doubt as to the Secret Council's aims. Under the mask of neutrality, neutral rights being insisted upon to the uttermost, there were maintained and encouraged hidden bases for German submarine warfare; there was an active and unchecked smuggling of arms, munitions, and military stores across from Greece to the North African coast in preparation of an Arab rising and an attack upon Egypt from the west; the Greek army had been mobilised, ostensibly as a measure of national security, but the real purpose was the less in doubt because, though kept on a supposed war footing, the Greek troops were rendered as far as possible valueless. They were ill-supplied; their pay was in arrear, or not forthcoming; their discipline neglected. They were allowed to become more and more ragged and dirty, and their arms out of condition. The authority of officers was undermined both by propaganda and by false or exaggerated reports destructive of *moral*; the officers, uncertain and bewildered, lost self-respect. And coincidentally with this deliberate erosion, a strange procedure on the part of a king bred to the profession of arms, there were formed at Athens and elsewhere the clubs of so-called Nationalists or Volunteers, the advertised object to protect the country from



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aggression, the actual design to overawe the majority opposed to the casting of Greek nationality into the Central European melting pot. This movement, originated and kept up by a corruption fund, was purely factitious. It was an organisation of all the idle blackguardism of the populace, more especially in the capital.

While immediately after their landing in October part of the British 10th Division were sent forward from Salonica to relieve the French troops holding the front from Kosturino to Lake Doiran, it was speedily realised that a movement up the valley of the Vardar, which that relief had been intended to assist, would merely be incurring a strategic risk for no useful end. In the circumstances, the task of linking up with the Serbians, besides being already impracticable, had become secondary to that of watching the northern frontier of Greece.

The first duty which fell to the British troops under the command of General Mahon was that of organisation, and preparation for the landing of reinforcements. An enemy thrust at Salonica was to be anticipated, and the Greek Government could not for a moment be depended upon. Assuredly the state of things which confronted General Mahon might well have discouraged any save a determined commander. There was a road from Salonica north-east to Seres, but it was in bad repair. There was a railway which serpentine through the hills from Salonica northwards to Lake Doiran, but it was a single track only, and in bad repair also. For the rest, the surrounding country was, broadly speaking, chaos, marked by undrained and festering swamps, the breeding places of malaria; the ordinary roads just unpaved tracks. A depth of official neglect and higger-mugger only to be met with in the Levant was written large upon the landscape. In order to establish a fortified base large enough to accommodate an important force, it was advisable in the meanwhile to employ the French and British divisions already on the spot as covering troops, and very wisely Sir Charles

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Munro, with his habitual caution, promptly so decided. It may have disappointed, and doubtless did disappoint, the public expectations of an advance into Serbia, but it assured larger and still practicable things. It was the first step towards making good past errors.

Not only had roads to be made and swamps to be drained, but accommodation had to be provided alike for the troops expected, for stores, and for sick and wounded. Order had to be evolved, and by hard work the face of the area occupied was steadily changed. To this activity General Munro in his despatches paid a well-earned tribute. The first Allied divisions sent to Salonica in the hope of pushing up the valley of the Vardar had been dispatched so hurriedly that they were not only destitute of a full transport equipment, but most of the units were without first line transport. Operations as a fully equipped force being out of the question, they had to be converted into mobile columns, that is on a semi-guerilla footing. That was done with remarkable expedition. At the same time, the prospective landing of reinforcements at Salonica had to be provided for. The storage space available in the port was inadequate; the lack of roads a great handicap; but by the resolution of General Mahon and his staff these obstacles were bit by bit overcome, and the clean, smartly attired British officers and men introduced into the life of the city a new energising element.

Nor were such preparations taken in hand a moment too soon. The main Allied reinforcements were landed at the beginning of December, their disembarkation much facilitated by the work already got through. This was fortunate, for two reasons. To begin with, in the attempt to push forward into Serbia in light order, and despite the Balkan winter, the covering troops had suffered acutely from cold. It is well known that between the coastal region forming their southern glacis and the Macedonian highlands representing the tumbled plateau north of the main mountain range, the difference in temperature during the winter months is extreme. The winter climate of the coastal zone is

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comparatively mild ; that of the highlands very severe. Often in the highlands the temperature falls to zero Fahrenheit, or below it. But besides these severities, intelligence left it certain that a large German-Bulgarian force was being concentrated in the Strumnitza valley for the purpose of making a thrust towards Salonica and cutting the communications of the Allied covering troops with that place. The thrust was anticipated. It proved too late to cut in as had been intended, but not too late to attack the covering force during its retirement. The brunt of this three days' battle, on December 6, 7, and 8, fell upon the British troops, who were holding the Allied right. Repulsing a superior force of Bulgarians, they extricated themselves from a by no means easy position with inconsiderable losses. So decided had been the repulse inflicted that their retreat was not further opposed.

With apparently no slight confidence it had been announced from Berlin that Salonica would be occupied by the German-Bulgarian troops, and the Allies driven out by the beginning of January, 1916. The attempt to press down the Vardar was made, and it failed. And in face alike of the Allied reinforcements, and of the difficulties of active campaigning in the Balkans in winter, the attempt was bound to fail. From that time the Allied grip upon the Salonica position solidified. This was a heavy blow to German and Austrian schemes, not merely because Salonica is the main commercial route between Central Europe and the Levant, but because of the check imposed upon the intrigues at Athens.

The general situation during the earlier months of 1916 was this: On the extreme right the districts of Seres and Drama, added to Greece after the Balkan Wars, were occupied by Greek troops, and in their hands was the pass through the mountains formed by the gorge of the Struma. At Stavros on the Strymon Gulf began the fortified lines of the British position, extending across the neck of the Chalkidike peninsula north-west to the Galiko river, and then to Lake Doiran.



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At Lake Doiran began the French lines which were continued as far as the Vardar, and covered its lower reaches on the west.

In the meanwhile, and as the re-equipment of the Serbian army proceeded, the political situation in Greece became more acute. The activities of the so-called Nationalists grew more openly terrorist. The political agitation in the Greek army, too, went on, and that once brilliant force showed itself increasingly demoralised and dissatisfied. In May, when General G. F. Milne took over the command of the British contingent of the Salonica army, occurred the episode of the surrender of the Struma Pass by the Greek troops holding it, the irruption of the Bulgarians into the eastern districts of Grecian Macedonia, and the withdrawal of the Greek forces there after one army corps had, so it was reported, taken service with the Central Powers. These events, added to the massing in Thessaly of troops supposed to be supporters of Constantine, the accumulation of munitions and stores in that province, and the difficulties placed in the way of the transport of the re-armed Serbians over Greek territory, moved the Guardian Powers at length to insist upon a Greek demobilisation. The demand, met by dilatory tactics, had to be enforced by an ultimatum. French troops, landed at Athens to give effect to the requirement of the Allied Powers that the Greek telegraphs and railways should be placed under their control, and the clubs disarmed, were attacked. The demobilisation was enforced in July. One immediate effect of this more decided attitude of the Great Allied Powers had been in June a revolt of the northern provinces and the islands from the Athens Government, and the formation of a Provisional Authority. At the same time, steps were initiated for raising in the seceding territories a Greek army of 80,000 men. Constantine, by these various measures, was rendered powerless. In December he abdicated, and the Crown Prince of Greece being excluded from the succession by the act of abdication, the King was replaced on the throne by his second son,

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Prince Alexander. The Serbian troops were transported from Corfu to Salonica.

The political difficulties, however, had consumed the greater part of the summer, and it was not until August, their rear freed from menace, that, reinforced by the Serbians, 70,000 strong, the combined force under the command of General Sarrail could enter upon offensive operations. In the interim fresh obstacles had arisen. The British right was now exposed to a Bulgarian menace, and the enemy by a powerfully supported forward movement on the west had established himself in the bend of the Cerna, and had seized and fortified the commanding height of Kamakchalan, north of Lake Ostrova.

Westwards from Salonica a line of railway runs to Monastir. After crossing just above the delta of the Vardar, it is carried through Vodena and from that place in line with the one practicable road of the region, passes between the northern end of Lake Ostrova and the Kamakchalan mountain. The latter, a flat-topped eminence with precipitous and cliff-like sides, dominates the road and railway, the lake and all the country to the south, and there is no other way to Monastir save by a detour of the lake over stiff hilly country impracticable, owing to the absence of roads, for all save the lightest of military transport. On the other hand, by the capture of this dominating position the Allied forces would be able to assault with some prospect of success the very elaborate trench system established by the enemy across the Cerna valley south of Monastir. The taking of Kamakchalan would afford the purchase for a flank attack. The plan of General Sarrail was by the capture of Monastir to turn the enemy's right, and it was, in fact, the feasible plan in the circumstances.

In conformity with that plan the British forces at the beginning of August took over the French positions south and west of Lake Doiran, and entered upon a series of attacks upon the Bulgarian line designed to prevent the transfer of hostile forces to the Monastir sector. A joint Anglo-French offensive against the

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centre of the enemy's front, launched on August 10, won some notable successes. While the French captured Hill 227 and La Tortue, the British took the features of the main range named by the troops Kidney Hill and Horseshoe Hill. These captures, while weakening the enemy's centre, strengthened ours, and obliged the Bulgarians here to stiffen their forces. It enabled the British force to be employed to hold the Allied centre as well as the right as they had been doing, and it will be seen that the effect was at once to add to the troops available for the proposed main movement, while diminishing those the enemy could dispose of to resist it. Of course coincidentally with the extension of the length of the British line the Bulgarian counter-pressure on the east from Demir Hissar and Seres was increased, and was met by a succession of operations across the Struma. Thanks to the British superiority in guns among other things, these activities were decidedly successful. Armoured motor cars were effectively employed, and the Royal Flying Corps proved a valuable co-operation. A number of villages were captured and held against strong Bulgarian counter-attacks, very expensive to the enemy. These operations, ably directed by Lieut.-General C. J. Briggs, further occupied a not inconsiderable part of the hostile strength.

Into the details of the main operations it is beyond present scope to enter, except to say that by a feat of daring which has rarely been surpassed the Serbians, who fought magnificently, took Kamakchalan by storm, swarming up the chimneys and gullies of its seemingly unscalable sides, and notwithstanding a desperate defence, sweeping it bare of the enemy. Kamakchalan taken, they drove the Bulgarians over the valley beyond, and winning a firm footing on the massif east of Monastir contributed materially to the fortunate outcome of the attack by the French which broke through the maze of trenches on the flat and led to the retaking of Monastir. Beyond this the offensive was not pushed, for in truth its chief immediate purpose had been achieved. Through Monastir lies the main

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landward route from Macedonia into Greece. By the capture of Monastir that route had been closed. At the same time it had become practicable to co-operate with the Italians from Valona.

It will have been gathered from this outline of events in the Balkans that there was between those events and the campaigns in Egypt an underlying connection. During 1916 there were campaigns in Egypt, both in Sinai and west of the Nile. The latter had been fed by traffic through Greece, and it was not until the closing of the Monastir route that the possibility of that traffic was cut off. The taking of Monastir was secondary only in importance to the occupation of Salonica itself. Cutting the landward communication of Germany with Greece, it dried up at their source those interests, avowed and unavowed, which from thence had derived vitality.

But while possibilities remained open, as they did during the whole of 1915 and part of the following year, and so long as fat though speculative profits were to be made, it would have been altogether foreign to the established characteristics of the Levant if material encouragement for a so-called Holy War in Northern Africa had not been forthcoming.

West of the Nile valley, its northern slopes close to the coast, there is a vast plateau, ranging in height between 500 and 600 feet. Along its southern edge extends a series of oases running very nearly from south-east to north-west. These dispersed spots of fertility mark the natural boundary between the plateau and the boundless waterless and trackless inland sea of sand dunes to the south—the Libyan Desert as it is called in maps. The Arab tribes inhabiting the plateau and the oases acknowledge in a loose way the authority of the Senussi of Sollum, that authority, however, being more religious than political. Equally in a loose way, the Senussi of Sollum was politically a dependent of the Egyptian Government. The suzerainty consisted chiefly of imposing on the Senussi responsibility for keeping the tribes under his authority in order.



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That his fanaticism and that of his followers should be played upon, and that he should be stirred up by presents of arms and munitions, gifts these tribesmen of the desert cannot resist, to declare a Jihad against the Infidel, was not one of the possibilities merely, but one of the probabilities. Signs of unrest began to appear as early as May, 1915. They proved to be due to the intrigues of Nuri Bey, a half-brother of Enver Pasha, and those of Gaafer Pasha. Nuri had been sent to Tripoli to open up negotiations with the Senussi, but he appears to have met with little success, for he had nothing to offer at Sollum save promises and persuasions. In due course, however, there arrived Gaafer Pasha, who backed the promises with arms and money. Gaafer was a German turned Moslem. Then affairs began to wear a different look. Outwardly and for some months the Senussi remained friendly, but in November, 1915, a succession of incidents on the frontier and on the coast left it certain that preparations had been made for war, and accordingly war was declared.

To reach Sollum from the Nile there are two routes : that along the narrow fringe of coast country north of the plateau, and that through the oases. In the Behera province of Egypt is an Arab population of some 120,000 who acknowledge the Senussi's religious headship. In order to prevent these tribesmen from raiding the cultivated country between the plateau and the Nile, it was judged the best course for the time being to draw in and concentrate the frontier posts, secure the nearer oases, and wait for the opportunity to strike at Sollum by sea. The town lies in the innermost recess of a bay surrounded on both sides by lofty hills. It had been occupied by a small British garrison of 109 men, but in view of the attitude of the tribesmen the garrison was on November 23 withdrawn by sea. Meanwhile, for frontier operations there was formed at Alexandria a force consisting of a Composite Mounted Brigade and a Composite Infantry Brigade ; the former (Brigadier-General Tyndale Briscoe in command) made up of three regiments of yeomanry, one regiment of the Australian

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Light Horse, and a battery of the Royal Horse Artillery, the latter—under Brigadier-General Lord Lucan—of four battalions (1/6th Royal Scots, 2/7th and 2/8th Middlesex, and 15th Sikhs). Both brigades had the Service equipment of mobile troops. The command was given to Major-General A. Wallace. Other troops, including camelry, were dispatched to occupy the oases.

Various brushes with the forces of the Senussi took place. Among the sharpest was that near Beit Hussein on December 13. A small flying column was sent out to disperse a body of tribesmen reported by aerial reconnaissance. Led by Lieut.-Colonel J. R. Gordon, the column was formed of 350 men of the 15th Sikhs; three squadrons of the 2nd Yeomanry; the Notts Battery, R.H.A.; six naval armoured cars, and one wireless car. The opposing force was found to be some 1,200 strong with machine-guns and two field pieces. They had taken up a position, well chosen, along the slopes of a dry watercourse, the Wadi Shaifa. Retreating from that position and waiting until the British had crossed, they suddenly turned, and attempted by outflanking to drive Gordon's men back into the ravine. For a time the situation looked critical, but the arrival in support of two squadrons of the Australian Light Horse on the outside of the hostile arc broke it, and enabled the British charging home to roll it up. This combat was characteristic of the campaign.

Another but more severe reverse was inflicted on the Senussi's men on December 25, more severe because they numbered this time some 5,000 and were commanded by Gaafer Pasha. On the report of the concentration within striking distance of the British advanced base at Matruh, General Wallace formed his force into two columns, the right consisting of the infantry screened by horse (the Royal Bucks Hussars) the left of the mounted men only. The guns (R.H.A.) were distributed part to each column, and the plan was to work round the enemy's right flank, the more mobile (left) column driving the hostile troops, mostly Senussi

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regulars, on to the British infantry. The action took place at Gebel Medwa, on the coast.

On the appearance of the British force the enemy retired towards the northern edge of the plateau and took up a position on a crest, beyond which, leading down to sea level, were various broad gullies. An assault upon the rising ground, the main position, was delivered by the Sikhs and New Zealanders. In the meanwhile, the Mounted Column, having ridden round to the south-west and defeated a body of horse covering the enemy's flank, pushed north towards the coast along the depression known as the Wadi Majid. The object, of course, was to cut off the enemy's retreat, for part of the British infantry column, the crest having been won, were engaged in driving the hostile force down the gullies coastwards. Gaafer's men, seeing the danger of being entrapped, thereupon broke into small detachments, and in that manner most slipped away westward along the coast route before the British horse could close the exit. But they lost heavily, and were obliged to abandon a large amount of ammunition, besides many camels and herds of cattle, their chief means of subsistence.

A third battle took place on January 22. The hostile forces, regathered, again advanced towards Matruh, accompanied on this expedition by a number of German and Turkish officers and by the Grand Senussi in person, evidently to give faith to his followers and the assurance that with the Prophet among them they must be victorious. Like the others, the purpose of this expedition was to break through and ravage the cultivated lands, the old practice of the Bedouin. No action was taken on the British side until the arrival from Alexandria of a battalion of the South African Infantry Brigade. During the interval the enemy had encamped at Halazen, 25 miles south-west of Matruh. Hostile movements were reported by aerial reconnaissance, which had altered the conditions of desert campaigning radically.

The British force was again formed into two columns,

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left under the command of Briscoe, the cavalry ; right under the command of Gordon, the infantry, consisting of the 2/8th Middlesex, the New Zealanders, South Africans and Sikhs, who were to carry out the chief attack. It was now the rainy season, and although rain never falls in the Nile valley or in Sinai, this western plateau is swept in January by rainstorms of tropical violence. One of these had recently been experienced, so that the wadis and gullies had become the beds of foaming torrents, and great patches of the plateau temporary swamps. Taking advantage of this state of things, the enemy had occupied at Bir Shola, 16 miles from Matruh, a position having at a distance of some three miles in front of it a long tract of swampy land. Opposing the British advance round this bad patch with a vanguard supported by machine-guns and artillery, he gradually fell back upon his battle position. The plan of General Wallace was to hold him with the British mounted troops while Gordon's force fell upon his left flank. The enemy, however, had also a turning movement of his own on hand on the opposite wing—the *British* left—and he attempted at the same time, being superior in numbers, to outflank Gordon. Both manœuvres were skilful in design, but both failed in the execution, for although the British force had had a trying march over heavy country, these onsets were defeated, with the result that the Senussi was obliged to abandon his camp, which the British occupied, destroying a large accumulation of stores. Such a misfortune with the Senussi on the ground played havoc with the Bedouin *moral*.

To complete this brief sketch of the Western Egyptian campaign, it may be added that in March, 1916, Sollum was re-occupied by a British Expeditionary Force. General Sir John Maxwell, who had in the meantime taken over the command in Egypt, decided, after weighing the alternatives, to advance to that place by way of the oases. One reason for that decision was that the enemy, defeated in his attempts to break into Egypt by the northern route, had been spreading



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eastward along the southern edge of the plateau. To assist aerial reconnaissance over the immense distances to be covered, a system of advanced air depots in the desert was established. The suggestion, originating with Captain van Rynfeld, R.F.C., and Mr. Jennings Bramley, of the Sudan Civil Service, proved of great utility.

Owing no doubt to the smuggling that went on, the enemy, commanded by Gaafer, was better supplied with machine-guns and artillery than in the earlier part of the campaign, and his plan was evidently to fight from oasis to oasis, delivering counter-attacks and carrying out enveloping movements wherever possible. The British Expedition was under the command of General Peyton. Its advance was steady, but sure. On February 26 the enemy was defeated at Agagia by General Lukin. Two days later, Barrani (50 miles east of Sollum) was occupied. The hostile force, in retreat upon Sollum, had begun rapidly to melt owing to desertions.

From Barrani Sollum can be reached by the Khedivial road running north-east until it strikes the coast, or by a route across the plateau westwards. It was the latter route Gaafer and his men had taken, and, notwithstanding the water problem, it was decided to follow him up. With that view, the Expeditionary Force was disposed into two columns: one formed of the infantry and heavier transport; the other of the cavalry and camelry, with the mounted guns. The latter column was to push on to Augerin, where there was reported to be a supply of water; the former to make good a footing on the plateau towards Sollum. When, however, Augerin was reached, on March 12, the reports as to water proved to be exaggerated. At best the supply found was sufficient for a portion only of the troops. General Peyton therefore decided to move his infantry by way of the coast while General Lukin with the mounted men only pushed on by the inland road. On the morning of March 14, the two columns having reunited near Bagbag, within striking distance of

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Sollum, closed in. It had been expected that the enemy would offer battle on the heights before the town. No longer, however, in a situation to resist, he was discovered by the airmen retreating west with his artillery. The armoured cars, under the command of Major the Duke of Westminster, were sent off in pursuit. The result was the capture of all the hostile guns, and the whole of the machine-gun equipment. Sollum was reoccupied.

From prisoners it was learned that the crews of H.M.S. *Tara*, and H.M.T. *Moorina*, both torpedoed off the coast during November, 1915, were held in captivity 75 miles west of Sollum. They had been made prisoners on landing. Without delay the armoured car detachment were hurried to the rescue. Though the country was quite unknown the distance was covered in a few hours, the force guarding the captured sailors surprised and routed, and the rescue completely successful. The commander of the detachment and his men received a special mention in despatches.

Coincidentally with the campaign on the west, the military authorities in Egypt had to deal with that on the east.

After the ill-success of the attack in Sinai in February, 1915—an enterprise which had incidentally revealed the formidable difficulties of the undertaking—the Turks in that region confined themselves to desultory fighting. They still ranged over the peninsula east of the Suez Canal, and from time to time there were brushes with the British mounted patrols and other troops, but it was not until July, 1916, that a second serious attack was undertaken. No doubt that season, supposed to be impracticable for campaigning, in such a region, was chosen because it was hoped that the effort would prove a surprise. It did not.

In January, 1916, the command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force had been transferred from Sir John Maxwell to Sir Archibald Murray. The special duty of this Force at the time was the protection of the

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Canal. Egypt was also a training ground for the Overseas troops in passage there.

Probably now, looking back, it may be judged that too large a strength was kept immobilised for a merely defensive function, and beyond doubt this political nervousness hampered operations alike in Mesopotamia and in the Balkans. Sir Archibald Murray records that in January, 1916, "though his (the enemy's) new means of communication in Southern Syria and Sinai, commenced with a view to an attack upon the Suez Canal, were still in a backward state, he undoubtedly had at his disposal the troops, amounting to 250,000 men or more, necessary to such an attack." Most likely this intelligence was true, but in this instance communications were the core of the problem, not numbers. A quarter of a million men at Damascus were a very different proposition from a quarter of a million men on the Suez Canal, and the greater the number necessary the greater the enigma of their transport. It was not merely ten times more difficult to transport 250,000 than 25,000. Under the conditions it was a hundred times more difficult. In fact, without command of the sea it was impossible.

The Hedjaz railway from Damascus to Mecca having been laid down before the war, there was apparently a belief at Constantinople that the obstacles to the transit of a very large force across Sinai might be overcome by the laying down of light railways and the establishment of depots en route. And no doubt they could have been were the command of the sea ensured, or even had there been no risk of attack or diversion by sea, though in the latter case the scheme was the less easy. The Germans, however, could assure neither of these conditions. What they thought they might rely upon was British lack of military boldness and failure to exploit the advantages of sea supremacy. In any event, the scheme for a time hung fire, for after the fall of Erzerum the concentration of troops at Damascus had to be drawn upon until it was reported to have been reduced to a total of 60,000 men only. This

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seems to have been considered a proportional reduction of the menace to Egypt. In truth it was nothing of the kind.

One of the first steps taken by the British in 1916 was the occupation of the district of Quatia and the construction of a railway to that place. Geographically this district, at the northern end of the Canal, is part of the Nile delta, and though little cultivated, affords sufficient water from wells for a considerable body of troops. It was on that account advisable to occupy it in force. In April, when the railway was nearing completion, only seven miles of line not being yet laid down, the Turks raided Quatia in strength, and there was some severe fighting. Several British posts having been driven in or wiped out, Quatia was attacked by the enemy on April 22. The Turks were some 2,500 strong, and the garrison only a squadron of the Gloucester Yeomanry. General Wiggin, in command of a column of yeomanry, forthwith advanced to its relief, but, unfortunately, not in time enough to prevent the capture of the place. An incident of this fighting was the gallant defence of the British post at Dueidar, held by 100 men of the 5th Royal Scots Fusiliers under the command of Captain Roberts. Handling his men with conspicuous skill against the heaviest odds, Captain Roberts beat off two heavy attacks, though delivered with the utmost determination, and held out until relief arrived in the form of the 4th Royal Scots Fusiliers (Major Thompson). The Turks, counter-attacked, were totally defeated and pursued by the 5th Australian Light Horse, who had come up during the engagement. Very brilliant service was, during this fighting, rendered by the Royal Flying Corps. They attacked the Turkish camps at Bir-el-Abd and Bir-el-Bayud with conspicuous effect. Quatia was reoccupied.

During May there were minor operations only, but from reports received the enemy was again concentrating forces in Sinai. As a precautionary measure, it was resolved to drain the pools and rock cisterns in the Wadi um Muksheib, 40 miles to the south-east of



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Ismailia. The work was carried out by detachments of engineers, covered by a column of Australian Light Horse, and the Bikanir Camel Corps. It occupied from June 10 to June 14. The force, under the direction of Lieut.-Colonel T. J. Todd, worked night and day.

For a considerable time the British railhead east of the canal had been at Oghratina, seven miles from Quatia, and there was no Turkish force nearer than Bir-el-Mazor, 18 miles to the east. But on the 18th and 19th July apparently a Turkish force some 9,000 strong moved westward from El Arish, and was ascertained by an air reconnaissance on the evening of July 19 to be occupying a front from Bir-el-Abd to Bir-el-Bayud. Next day this force advanced to Oghratina, which the British were compelled to evacuate. The hostile column was discovered to be the 3rd Turkish Division, provided with mountain guns, special machine-gun companies, and heavy artillery; the heavy guns manned by Germans and Austrians, and the machine-gun companies under German officers. According to the information given by prisoners, the 3rd Division was only the advance guard of a larger body of troops one day's march behind them. The 3rd Division was accompanied by a body of Arab camelry commanded by Colonel Kress von Kressenstein. The equipment, including wireless sections and field hospitals, had, it was afterwards found, been schemed out in Germany for desert campaigning.

This Turkish Expedition hugged the coast, and the British measures were a bombardment by monitors of the hostile trenches and camps and a harrying by mobile and mounted troops of the enemy's left flank and rear.

For some days the expected attack failed to develop, but on August 3 it had become apparent that there would be a thrust between Romani and Mahemdiah on the coast. To check this a line of British outposts had been established. On August 4 the outpost line was engaged. Although the first assault was beaten off, the line was driven in. By now the hostile plan was clear; it was to shell with the heavy guns from the east

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the fortified line defending the Canal and at the same time to assault it in flank from the south.

The total enemy strength engaged was some 18,000 men.

General Lawrence, commandant of the British troops, had determined to meet the southern move, delivered by the main body of the Turkish infantry, with a counter-stroke against their left flank and rear. Held back until the impetus of the Turkish assault had spent itself against the fortified line, and then suddenly launched from amid the screen of the sand dunes with a powerful backing of mounted men, the counter-thrust was completely successful, and the Turkish defeat decisive. In the pursuit, continued for three days, 4,000 of the enemy were rounded up. Captures of equipment included a heavy Krupp gun, a battery of mountain guns, with accessories, machine-guns with mountings for camel transport, 2,300 rifles, a million rounds of rifle and machine-gun ammunition, 500 camels, 100 horses and mules, a large amount of miscellaneous stores, and two field hospitals. The enemy casualties in the action were some 5,000 men. Thus ended the second attempt upon the Canal, an even more unfortunate enterprise than the first.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RECAPTURE OF KUT AND THE TAKING OF BAGDAD

Sir Stanley Maude appointed to the Mesopotamia Command—Decides upon an offensive—Reasons for it—The preparations—British Staff and Administrative work—Improvement of the River Transport and other Services—Movement of Reinforcements up the Tigris—Enemy's counter-measures—Strength of the defences round Kut—Maude's strategy—British cross the Shatt-el-Hai—Threat to the Turkish right-rear—Bombardment at Sanna-i-yat—Enemy defences east of the Hai captured—Defences astride of the Hai stormed—Assault on the Dahri bend defences—British attacks at Sanna-i-yat—Enemy's dilemma—Capture of the Shumran bend, the key of Kut—Turks evacuate the town—The British pursuit—Destruction of the enemy's river flotilla—British advance to Zana—Advance to Ctesiphon—The Diala reached, March 7, 1917—Change in British tactics—The defence out-manceuvred—Bagdad railway terminus occupied—Crossing of the Diala—Turkish retreat—British entry into Bagdad (March 11)—Turkish defensive crippled.

SIR PERCY LAKE remained in command of the Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia until August, 1916. From the fall of Kut until that date operations were both of a minor character and in the main defensive. Neither the numerical strength nor the health of the troops allowed of much beyond the work of regularising the occupation of the wide territory now under British control. In addition to the vilayet of Basra it embraced the region of the lower Euphrates.

In August the command was transferred to Sir Stanley Maude. At the outbreak of the War Maude was on the Staff of the 5th Division. Joining the Army in 1884 with a commission in the Coldstream Guards, he had

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seen service in the Soudan, and also in the Boer War, where he won the D.S.O. From 1901 he had filled various Staff appointments. In command of the 14th Infantry Brigade in the British Expeditionary Force sent to France in September, 1914, he fought at Mons, and in the retreat, was sent home severely wounded, but happily recovered. Promoted on recovery to the rank of Major-General he was given the command of the 13th Division, and with them took part in the operations in Gallipoli. It was the work and efficiency of his division in the efforts to relieve Kut which marked him out as a commander of genius.

Surveying the situation in Mesopotamia when the responsibility for it devolved upon him, General Maude perceived that the enemy's plan was for the time being to contain the British forces on the Tigris and coincidentally to develop in Persia an offensive designed to reduce that country to a dependency. Between the two courses of defence and attack which might in the circumstances be followed on the British side, the first, owing alike to the extent of territory to be covered and the conflicting interests which demanded protection, meant such a dispersal of forces that the resistance must be passive. On that ground General Maude rejected it. The true solution of the problem, he decided, was attack. A resolute offensive entered upon with concentrated forces and carried on with energy would threaten Bagdad, and Bagdad was the centre from which the enemy's operations were conducted alike in Persia and in Mesopotamia. Successful, this stroke would react both on the hostile activities in Persia and in the region of the Euphrates.

But if the true solution of the problem was attack, as undoubtedly it was, then all the more necessary was it to ensure that attack should not fail. To his preparations for the offensive General Maude devoted three and a half months. Nor was the interval too long. The health of the troops had to be improved, and their training taken in hand. Communications, still precarious, had to be made efficient, and the transport



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question dealt with. Sufficient reserves of supplies and munitions also had to be massed and got up to the front. Among other organisation work, Sir Percy Lake, with results now to prove of the highest value, had given his attention to the conversion of Basra into a suitable military port and base. Railways had been laid down; steps taken to check the effects of the inundations which in the spring of every year spread over the lowlands bordering the Shatt-el-Arab; river transport was placed under a permanent directorate; and other directorates created for Port Administration and Conservancy, Works, Railways, Supply, and Ordnance. For these experienced men had been sent out, and at the same time additional river-craft. The foundation laid had been solid. Yet another directorate created had been that of Local Resources. Under a just administration and with a properly guided distribution Mesopotamia was capable of furnishing not inconsiderable supplies and of thus relieving overseas transport. The means of distribution, an advantage alike to the inhabitants and the army, had been wanting. They were now organised. At the same time the Medical Service was strengthened and the hospital accommodation enlarged. Coincidentally the Remount and Veterinary Services were overhauled and improved.

The revision extended to the Army. General Maude regrouped his formations, saw that each unit had its proper establishment, and tuned up the Staff. With characteristic thoroughness he went into the question of communications, knowing their primary importance. The defences of lines already existent were recast and further lines for administrative purposes opened up so that they might not interfere with those of the strictly Expeditionary operations. As supplemental also to the river service, the land transport attendant upon the Force was made more complete by the provision alike of animals and of vehicles. In brief, the three and a half months taken up were a period of incessant activity. It is not work which bulks largely in the public eye, and seldom receives mention in debates or newspapers, but

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its effects are enduring. Not more remarkable than the soundness of General Maude's judgment on the main issues was his grasp of detail. Personally he did not spare himself. He visited every point where direct inspection and inquiry were advisable, and assured himself that the machinery was both completed and in good working order. Taking no risks, he toured on the one side to Ahwaz, and on the other to Nazariyeh.

In November reinforcements had begun to move up the Tigris from Basra, accompanied by the needed equipment and stores. At the end of that month the Force which was to strike the intended blow at Kut had been concentrated above Sheik Saad. The Army in Mesopotamia was at the top of its form.

On his side the enemy had not wholly been idle. He appears, however, to have acted upon the belief that a British offensive in Mesopotamia had, after the loss of Kut, been indefinitely suspended, and, occupied chiefly with the campaign in Persia, had contented himself on the Tigris with stiffening his defences. It was a perfectly just view that his aim, pending the issue of the Persian campaign, was to contain the British, and it could not be doubted, accepting these premisses, that, successful in the Persian campaign, and opening up by that means a menace to the British positions in the Farther East, he intended then to turn with all his resources upon Mesopotamia. A powerfully delivered anticipatory blow was at once the surest and quickest way of wrecking that scheme.

On two grounds the Germans and Turks considered the defences of Kut to be impregnable. The failure of the British attacks upon the Sanna-i-yat position in April had demonstrated its strength. In the meanwhile, the position had been further elaborated. Not only were there six successive lines of entrenchments between the Tigris and the Suweikiya Marsh, but other defences had been made extending back as far as Kut itself, a distance of fifteen miles. It was an extraordinary maze. And on the other side of Kut was the Shumran bend, held also to be uncapturable, covered as it was by

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a bridgehead position on the right (or southern) bank of the river. This bridgehead had been strengthened, in the first instance by a line of outer defences extending north-east to south-west from the Tigris to the Shatt-el-Hai, cutting off the Khadairi bend. Crossing the Shatt-el-Hai two miles from its confluence with the Tigris, the outer line struck then north-west, reaching the great river again opposite the end of the Shumran bend. It may here be observed that the several bends, taking them on the way upstream, were the Khadairi (right bank), the Kut peninsula (left bank), the Dahra (right bank) and the Shumran (left bank). But besides the outer defences there was on the south side of the Tigris an inner system, divided into three sections any one of which might be held independently of the others, or any two independently of the third. They were, east of the Hai, the works in the Khadairi bend ; a central position astride of the Hai, and the works west of the Hai in the Dahra bend. The works on the right bank of the river and those on the left bank were linked up by two pontoon bridges, one near the mouth of the Shatt-el-Hai, the other on the east side of the Shumran peninsula. It is not surprising that the enemy thought himself secure.

On weighing up the situation, however, General Maude saw that strategically its advantages were in his favour. To begin with, if he attacked the position at Sanna-i-yat he could do so without being in turn exposed to any counter-assault on his right flank, for the great extent of the Suweikiya Marsh imposed a long *détour*. It was open to him therefore to demonstrate against those defences with perfect safety on his own side. Next he seized upon the fact that if he struck on the right bank of the river and could establish himself on the Shatt-el-Hai, the enemy would be obliged to fight front to flank, that is, with his battle line and his communications parallel, a position which in the event of defeat would render retreat difficult, and in any event disorderly. Thirdly, the enemy could not turn the British left, so that, secure also on that flank, the British might strike at the Turkish communications

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from across the Tigris as far west as was practicable. In short, the key to Kut and its defences was not Sanna-i-yat, but the bridgehead. That taken, it would be feasible to open an attack upon the Shumran position, and that also taken Kut was won.

The main Turkish forces had, in view of the British concentration at Sheik Saad, been withdrawn to the Kut side of the river, the anticipation evidently being that Sanna-i-yat would again be the terrain of the chief attempt. The real point of the British commander's strategy indeed at first escaped the enemy's attention altogether. Nor was the real point one which would in any event have been easy to divine, for its very boldness was its best disguise. And its boldness lay in the reliance, entirely justified, upon the security of both flanks of the British line against counter-attack. That security made it possible with little risk to stretch out the line along the right bank of the river in feelers for the weak spot of the defence and the most effective point for crossing. Obligated to hold on at Sanna-i-yat, the Turkish forces would be stretched out at the same time, so that either the position at Sanna-i-yat would have to be evacuated, or the peril faced of the British striking across the Tigris westward and cutting communications. In short, the design was to impale the Turkish commander on the horns of a dilemma, and this design was the less apparent because seemingly the British operations did open with an assault upon the Sanna-i-yat defences. Nor was it until the enemy's strength had been massed in that quarter that the weight of the offensive was seen to be swung against the defences covering the Shatt-el-Hai.

For the purpose of the British operations Maude formed his troops into two columns. That under Lieut.-General Sir A. S. Cobbe, V.C., was to attack at Sanna-i-yat; that under Lieut.-General Sir W. R. Marshall to move against the Hai defences by a surprise march.

This march, the column having been concentrated before Es Sinn, took place on the night of December 13. At six the following morning the Hai was crossed at



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two points—Basrugiyeh and Atah. Pivoting on its right, the column then moved north, the infantry on the east side of the Hai, the cavalry on the west side. Enemy advanced posts were thus driven in. The move had proved a surprise because on the preceding day (December 13) General Cobbe had opened a bombardment of the Sanna-i-yat defences.

Having launched his stroke, General Maude acted swiftly. pontoons and other materials being already pushed across the country in the rear of Marshall's column, the Hai was on December 14 bridged at Atah. But the enemy had been quick to appreciate the threat these operations implied, for his first proceeding was the removal of his own pontoon bridge east of Shumran to a point higher up stream, though that work on the night of December 14 was seriously interfered with by British airmen, who, flying by moonlight, bombed the pontoons, causing some of them to break adrift. The enemy bridge over the Tigris near the mouth of the Hai was broken up by gunfire, and pontoon rafts, used as ferries, sunk. This done, General Marshall extended his grip upon the Turkish defences, and by December 18 had succeeded in cutting in opposite Kut between the outer Turkish defences east of the Hai and those west of it. The position at its apex was at once most difficult to defend, and most exposed to cross fire.

This beginning had been good, and despite the heavy rains which fell in the latter part of December, 1916, and the first week of January, 1917, converting large tracts of the country into swamps, and causing a rapid rise of the Tigris, activities were not suspended. The light railway was pushed forward as far as the Shatt-el-Hai; additional bridges were thrown over that waterway, and new roads made. Raids carried out against the Turkish communications resulted in captures of stock and grain. But although the bombardment of the Sanna-i-yat defences by Cobbe's force continued, the enemy had now become well awake to the threat against his right rear. He had accordingly rebuilt his pontoon bridge to the west of the Shumran bend.

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On December 20, under cover of a bombardment both at Sanna and from that position along the Tigris as far as Kut, an attempt had been made by a British column to bridge the river four miles above Shumran. The attempt did not succeed. The bank on the farther (left) side was found to be strongly entrenched. Though gallantly essayed, the launching of the pontoons had to be given up owing to the severity of the hostile fire.

Notwithstanding that their lateral communications on the Woolpress village side of the river had been severed, the Turks, clinging to their footholds both east and west of and astride the Shatt-el-Hai, kept open the communications between these positions and Kut by means of ferries, and appeared determined to hold them at all costs. It became necessary therefore to clear them out. The position east of the Hai was first dealt with. Time was not to be lost, for among other things the enemy had control of the river bunds, and in the high flood season, now approaching, might, by cutting these embankments, swamp the British lines. Some 2,600 yards in length, the Turkish inner line east of the Hai extended from the Tigris above the Megasis Fort to near the mouth of the Shatt-el-Hai, thus enclosing a roughly quadrangular tract, bounded on three sides by the river. A double row of sandhills 200 yards from the outfall of the Shatt-el-Hai had been utilised for covered-in machine-gun emplacements, and formed a formidable point of support. Behind this first line was a second, the intervening ground, 500 to 1,000 yards in width, also entrenched. Finally, linked up with the right of the second line and immediately adjacent to the Tigris was another group of sandhills, which sheltered the ferries from direct fire. The sandhills formed a last position.

The defences commanded a field of fire across an expanse both flat and, save for a fringe of brushwood along the river bank, bare. The fortified line had consequently to be approached by sapping. Amid almost unceasing rain, and exposed to persistent fire both from the hostile defences in front and from enemy batteries

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on the farther side of the river, the troops of General Cobbe's column, who had been told off for the work, dug, between January 5 and January 7, some 25,000 yards of saps and trenches, and advanced to within 200 yards.

Opened on January 7, the bombardment was continued throughout January 8. On January 9 the first assault was launched. The point selected was the section of the defences, 600 yards long, nearest the Shatt-el-Hai. It happened, unfortunately, that the morning was marked by a thick mist. This helped the attacking troops in the first rush, but hampered the artillery support, and it enabled the enemy to prepare and launch a counter-attack. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting ensued. On the left of the British attack were the Gurkhas and Mahrattas. Receiving and throwing back the weight of the hostile onset, and pressing on, they reached the Tigris. The enemy now found his own right exposed, and his next move was to throw his weight against the British right and try to press them back against the Shatt-el-Hai. The British right, formed of the Manchesters and an Indian brigade, could not, however, be dislodged from the footing they had gained. The ground won was consolidated.

Next day the British attack was renewed. Foot by foot the Turks resisted, but they were cleared out of one trench after another, and at nightfall held only the last position among the second group of sandhills.

The third day opened with an assault on this foothold. The thrust got home, but had to give way before a counter-attack. Encouraged by his success, the enemy, unfortunately for himself, tried to push farther forward. His movement resulted in a heavy reverse. The Sikhs here fought magnificently. In view of the cost of attempting openly to rush the enemy's final position, it was deemed advisable to complete trenches enabling the assaulting troops to assemble under cover. This labour occupied five days. On its completion a Turkish redoubt so constructed as to enfilade the British assault—this work had already given trouble—was stormed in a

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night operation. The British who had taken it were driven out. They took it again, and were again ejected. Next morning they seized the work a third—and last—time. The general attack had been fixed for January 19. During part of the night of the 18th the Turks kept up a very active rifle and machine-gun fire. When day broke it was found that their whole position on the sandhills had been evacuated.

The fighting since January 7 had been severe, and for the most part hand to hand. Events proved, however, that it had already vitally damaged the defence. There was heavy fighting still ahead, but from this time the issue was no longer in any doubt.

The next step was the capture of the defences astride the mouth of the Hai—the connecting link between those in the Khadairi bend and those in the Dahra bend. Ingeniously designed as they had been, the enemy thought Kut could not be successfully assaulted from this south side. Since, too, there were on the north side of the river the Sanna-i-yat maze below and the strongly fortified Shumran bend above Kut, it will be seen that, so far as field works and engineering skill could do it, the place had been converted into a fortress of the first class, and was intended to remain on that footing.

The central hostile position astride the Hai presented altogether an outer face 3,800 yards in length, and formed one maze of works and diggings—and maze is in this instance literally the exact term to employ. Further, though the artillery support on the British side was not inadequate—General Maude had seen to that—nevertheless the problem of transport, improved as the river service had been, did not admit of the phenomenal gunfire witnessed in operations in Europe. The task of capture really hung upon the valour and skill of the infantry. It happened, however, that the Commander-in-Chief of the Expedition had chosen his lieutenants with his usual good judgment. General Marshall, while inclined to bold methods, qualified that trait with habitual coolness. He was decisive, quick to seize the spirit and substance of an order, never lost time, and



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was legitimately confident, because clear-minded. General Cobbe, with a far from common knowledge of the co-operation of infantry, artillery and horse, and of what they could and what they could not do, was always to be depended upon to employ his force with the maximum of effect. Such practical qualities were invaluable. There were no risks of hitches and breakdowns; no essentials overlooked. Admirable troops, so led, might confidently be asked to undertake difficult tasks.

The assault on the central position, opened on January 25 by General Marshall's column, carried the whole of the first line. While making good, the British were repeatedly counter-attacked. These efforts were marked by desperation. More than once it came to bayonet fighting. But in that the Turks lost heavily. On the western side of the Hai more particularly there were during the 25th four of these enemy onsets. The first failed completely; the second, pressed with determination as far as the captured line, was finally beaten by a charge of the Warwicks, who with admirable gallantry advanced across the open to where the *mêlée* was fiercest, and turned the scale. The third reaction was smashed by the British batteries. The enemy, nevertheless, made yet another effort, prefaced by a concentration of his guns and trench mortars. Under cover of that fire he on this western sector won his defences back.

It was a Pyrrhic triumph all the same, and temporary at that, for not only had the cost been excessive, but when two Punjabi battalions were sent forward to renew the assault on the morning of the 26th they cleared the battered trenches with a rush and put on this part of the business what proved the finishing touch.

From January 26 until February 1 there were repeated assaults and bombing attacks on both faces of the salient. But on the latter date the hostile third line east of the Hai was carried by the Cheshires, who bombed along its entire length. On the west side the struggle went on until February 3. By that time nothing was left of the salient it had taken the enemy months to fortify, save

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the Liquorice Factory at its north-west corner, adjoining the line covering the Dahra bend. The fighting had been severe. Trenches were found crowded with Turkish dead, for the British gunners had excelled themselves both in energy and in the boldness with which their batteries had been pushed forward. To quote also the words of General Maude on the qualities of the infantry shown during the operations in the Khadairi bend, and not less applicable here, "the enemy, in spite of his tenacity, had more than met his match in the dash and resolution of our troops, and had learned a lesson which was to become more deeply engrained."

Alike by the now yawning breach in his works, and by the casualties inflicted on his force, the enemy must by this have realised that he was waging a losing battle. But apart from the belief in the impregnability of Kut, there is no doubt that the orders were to hold out to the last at all costs. In the defence of fortified positions the Turk is at his best, and the resistance had been desperate because there was nothing immediately at the back of it. Thrown on the one hand into Persia, or on the other ear-marked for the project against Egypt, the Turkish forces had been scattered in the confidence that in any event Kut would prove an absolute bar to a British advance. Every day the political as well as the military wisdom of General Maude's decision to attack became more evident. No enemy troops advanced to the relief of the hard-pressed garrison. None were available.

The third phase of the attack on the right bank—that upon the defences in the Dahra bend—opened on February 6 with a bombardment continued by bursts of fire at irregular intervals during the two following days, and accompanied by enterprises against advance posts. One by one these were cleared off the ground and the hostile front exposed. The Dahra bend is rather broad than narrow, in shape almost an equilateral triangle. It was determined in the first instance to assault the Turkish line in the centre and on its extreme right. In the centre the King's Own broke in ;

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on the right the Worcesters. Working towards Yssu-fiyah, the Worcesters reached the Tigris opposite the southern end of the Shumran peninsula and entrenched.

Then on February 10 a grip was taken on the enemy's left, adjacent to the Liquorice Factory. Steps were now set afoot to connect up the breaches there and in the centre. Though enfiladed by fire from across the river at Kut, replied to on the British side with a sustained bombardment, the Buffs and Gurkhas cleared the intermediate section of the defences, joined up with the King's Own, and in company with them pushed forward. There had thus been torn in the position a gap 2,000 yards wide and 300 yards deep. The Liquorice Factory, no longer defensible, was abandoned. By February 13 the Turkish defences in the bend had been isolated. Communications across the Tigris were kept under continuous bombardment.

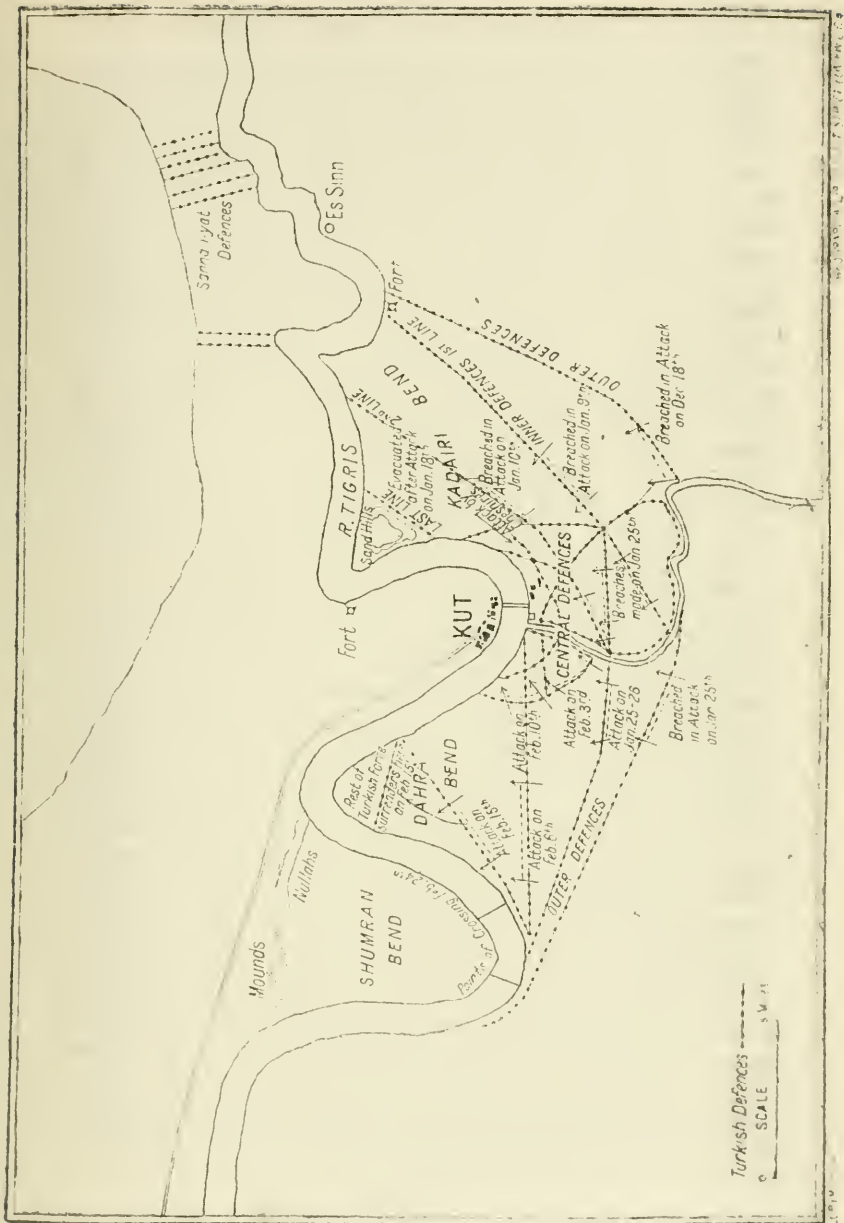
A final assault delivered on February 15 against the extreme left of the hostile position as it now existed—the front as driven in ran diagonally across the Dahra bend from south-west to north-east—by unmasking the enemy's batteries, revealed his expectation that the weight of the renewed British attack would fall on his left. As a fact, the sector picked out for the real assault was the right centre. In view, however, alike of his own expectations and of the feint, the enemy had massed his main force on his left and a British barrage was put down to keep it there. At the same time, the Welsh Fusiliers and the South Wales Borderers, launched against the sector marked out, went forward with irresistible dash, broke through on a front of 700 yards, bombed along the defences over another 1,000 yards, and pushed the Turks back nearly a third of a mile. Counter-attacks, when they developed, had none of the *élan* of those in the fighting for the central position astride the Hai. Immediately after the Welshmen, and on their right, the Buffs and Dogras went in, and wheeling to north cut off the enemy's left. Pushed back to the banks of the Tigris, his surviving troops there laid down their arms. They numbered about 1,000. All

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that now remained of the Dahra bend position was a section of rear trenches on the Turkish right, contiguous to the river and about a mile in extent, and it had been intended to attack these on the morning of the 16th, but two companies of a Gurkha battalion in the line opposite this point, disappointed at not having been more actively employed, essayed a night raid on their own initiative, crept over in the darkness, broke into the position, and before daylight had seized it from end to end, adding 264 to the total of 2,005 prisoners.

Now began another phase of the operations. The position in the Shumran bend had been uncovered, and, as the key of Kut, it was the point of the main impending operations. But it remained advisable to disguise that intention as far as possible. On the day therefore after the capture of the Dahra bend defences (February 16), Cobbe opened his assault at Sanna-i-yat. Delivered when the ground, owing to a day and a night of soaking rain, seemed impracticable, the opening movement took the Turks by surprise. The first and second lines of Turkish trenches were taken with little loss. But once recovered from his astonishment the enemy gathered his strength for a counterblow, backed by the full weight of his guns and trench mortars, and though the Turkish counter-attacks were costly the British failed to hold. It looked, indeed, as if the experiences of April were to be repeated. Of course that was the impression that the enemy had been intended to form. For three days Cobbe's force was seemingly inactive. Then the assault was repeated, and at the same point of the line. Again the enemy was surprised, not looking for a blow in the same place, and for the second time, once more too with but slight British losses, the Turkish first and second lines were broken through. Six enemy counter-attacks resulted. On this occasion they failed. The British were not to be dislodged. Rarely in any battle had tenacity been either more sharply tried or more brilliantly displayed. Where the line swayed it had at once been restored. On the right, held by the





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Seaforths, it had refused even to sway. The Highlanders stood like the granite of their native mountains.

Nor was this stratagem the only resource. A bombardment of Kut had been opened from across the river, and preparations made for throwing a bridge over from the Liquorice Factory. While pains were apparently taken to conceal them, the preparations were pushed on during daylight, as if time were precious. The device had the effect intended. Occupied with the defence of Sanna, and watching his position at Shumran, the Turkish commander now became concerned for his centre. It was weak. To stiffen it he moved more of his force from Shumran into the Kut peninsula. To move them back to Shumran meant a *détour* of ten miles, nearly a day's march. Lest, however, there should be any mistake a detachment of Punjabis, accompanied by Sappers and Miners and Sikh Pioneers, carried out a raid across the river from the Megasis Fort.

This change in the enemy dispositions accomplished, the point picked out for crossing was the south end of the Shumran bend. The covering troops, the Norfolks and two battalions of Gurkhas, were silently ferried over before daybreak (February 23). The Norfolks caught the Turks literally napping, rounded up 200 prisoners, and took five machine-guns. But the Gurkhas, lower downstream, were less fortunate. While still afloat, their pontoon rafts were swept by a machine-gun fusillade. It would have been legitimate in the circumstances to give up the attempt. Notwithstanding their serious losses, however, the Gurkhas declined to go back, landed, and joined up on the right of the Norfolks. Supported by a fourth battalion ferried over where the Norfolks had landed, the covering troops then advanced on a west and east line, and by the afternoon had cleared the southern end of the peninsula to the depth of a mile. Meanwhile, the rest of the bend had been laid under a British cross fire over the river from the West, and meanwhile too the bridging had gone on. By half-past four in the afternoon the bridge was ready for traffic, and by

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nightfall the infantry of one division had passed over. Already the covering troops, defeating enemy counter-attacks, had taken 700 prisoners. It may be added that on this day (February 23) General Cobbe had eaten further into the Sanna position by seizing the third and fourth lines. The defence of Kut was breaking up.

By dawn on the 24th the whole of Marshall's column were on the north side of the river, and the Shumran bend in their possession. The stiff fighting was at its outlet. Here the chief Turkish defences lay. To the north-east various nullahs, traces of ancient ditches or lines of wall covered with earth had been taken advantage of; to the north-west an expanse of mounds and ruins. The enemy fought stubbornly, but aeroplane reconnaissances while the battle was in progress showed that his main columns were already in retreat and that the opposing force was a rearguard. The latter were driven back with heavy casualties and a further loss of 1,650 prisoners, besides four guns, some thousands of rifles, and a great quantity of ammunition, equipment and stores. Coincidentally, Cobbe (February 24) broke through the sixth and last trench lines at Sanna, and the British gunboats, ordered upstream from Falahiyeh, had reached Kut.

During the night of February 24 the enemy's rearguard at Shumran decamped. Early on the morning of the 25th, therefore, the pursuit began, the cavalry to the north on the enemy's right rear, the gunboats following him upstream on his left.

To check this movement the hostile rearguard had taken up an entrenched position two miles to the west of the Shumran bend, and again, though shelled from the river, held out during the day. The British infantry attack, pressed home into the Turkish trenches, took another 400 prisoners. Well supported by artillery sunk in gunpits, the resistance had been brave, but the rearguard had been sacrificed to save the main force.

Nothing now remained for the retiring army save alacrity. With the object of intercepting them, a column



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of the British troops made a forced march of eighteen miles across the desert plain. On the other hand, to quicken their own movement the Turks cast aside guns, rifles, equipment, munitions, vehicles and stores of all kinds, and these strewed their track for mile after mile. Despite such abandonments the gunboat flotilla on the one side and the British cavalry on the other gradually caught up. The flotilla had to fight a duel with the enemy's artillery covering his rear and, overtaking the hostile steamers, an action in which four of the Turkish vessels, *Sumana*, *Basra*, *Firefly* and *Pioneer*, were taken. The loss of these steamers, crippling their river communications, was for the Turks a heavy blow. *Basra* was crowded with men who had fallen out on the march or had been wounded.

So rapid had been the enemy's flight that on the evening of February 27 his troops reached Aziziya, 50 miles from Kut. They had covered that distance in two days. Nevertheless, all through the 27th the British gunboats had hung on to and shelled them from the river, while the British cavalry harried their outer flank, and when the retreating army reached Aziziya and streamed through that place it was as a broken, demoralised and, in part, unarmed mob.

At Aziziya the pursuit paused. Before a further advance could be made from that point, midway between Kut and Bagdad, the line of communication, thus lengthened, had to be reorganised. To have gone at once would have been the haste which in the end loses time. In no small measure it had been the improvement in communications which in the attack upon Kut had rendered General Maude's penetrating and skilful strategy at once practicable and telling. But while Aziziya had to be converted into a suitable jumping off-place, it was equally urgent that time should not be wasted. How efficient by comparison transport had become was proved by the transfer of the necessary munitions and stores from below Kut in less than seven days. Six months before it could hardly have been done in as many weeks. In the operations now

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immediately to follow, this acceleration made the difference between assured success and almost equally certain failure.

During the same interval General Cobbe's column had closed to the front, clearing up on the way the line of the Turkish retreat.

Communications readjusted, Marshall's column on March 5 moved forward 18 miles to Zeur. It was a long march, but the troops were again fit. They were screened by the cavalry, which, pushing on a further seven miles to Laj, there came upon an enemy rearguard holding the nullahs, which here intersect the country like a network. It happened that the British horse reached Laj in the midst of an intense dust storm. Denuded, where arid, of vegetation, the surface of the vast level plain, when swept by dry winds, becomes obscured by an impenetrable dust cloud driven before the blast like a monstrous rolling bank of smoke. This impeded the cavalry, but on the other hand it equally mystified the enemy both as to the strength of the force and its movements. A regiment of hussars, charging forward, actually found themselves in the Turkish position. Feeling themselves in the circumstances insecure, the rearguard, as soon as darkness fell, withdrew, guiding themselves by following the river.

On the succeeding day (March 6) the dust storm was still blowing, but once more taking the river as a guide the British cavalry again pushed on. They rode as far as Ctesiphon, and found there an entrenched position on both sides of the river elaborately prepared, but deserted. Not a Turk was anywhere met with. Evidently the apparition of the pursuing cavalry at Laj had decided the Turkish commander that to stand at Ctesiphon involved under the conditions too great a risk. After all, the dust storm, though an ill-wind, had cleared the most serious military obstacle between Kut and the Diala. Besides, the rapidity of the British movements had afforded the enemy neither time to refit nor to receive reinforcements. This state of affairs was ascertained from Turkish prisoners picked up in a dashing

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reconnaissance extended nine miles beyond Ctesiphon, and to within three of the Diala position.

Behind the cavalry Marshall's column had on this day (March 6) marched seventeen miles to Bustan, and Cobbe's column had moved up from Aziziya to Zeur.

In movement early on the 7th, the British advance guard in the afternoon reached the Diala, eight miles from Bagdad. In its lower course the Diala flows into the Tigris across a perfectly flat expanse. On the farther, or Bagdad, side were gardens, groves, and cultivated country; on the nearer side, the bare and open plain. Having, while his own batteries were concealed, this advantageous field of fire, the enemy, it was evident, meant seriously to dispute the crossing. To attempt that operation in daylight was in fact impracticable. All that could be done, therefore, was to wait for darkness, and in the interval to search the hostile gun positions both from in front and with the armament of the flotilla on the Tigris.

Along the farther bank of the Diala, hidden among the bushes and groves, the enemy had posted machine-guns. The night of March 7, it chanced, was one of bright moonlight, the weather having now again become settled. Accordingly, when the pontoons were moved up they came under a withering rifle and machine-gun fusillade. The first that got into the water was forthwith riddled with shot. Five others were floated. None, however, could be ferried over. All the men on them were either killed or disabled. Out of control, they drifted with the current, were carried down to the Tigris, and there recovered with the surviving wounded.

For the time being the attempt had to be given up. So far, however, from being embarrassed by these difficulties, General Maude had determined upon a diversion which, as it proved, succeeded completely. Kut had been taken by an attack from the south, and it was now evident that the enemy feared a repetition of that manœuvre, for aeroplane reconnaissance dis-

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closed that he had thrown up defences round the suburb of Bagdad on the opposite bank of the Tigris, and taken measures to guard himself against being turned from the south-west. With the ready resource of a masterly hand General Maude resolved to play up to these apprehensions. The terminus of the Bagdad railway was in this suburb on the farther side of the river, and the line was carried up to Samarra on that bank. Further a little to the north-west of the suburb was a shallow lake of considerable area, the Akarkuf, connected both with the Tigris and with the Euphrates by a cross waterway similar to the Shatt-el-Hai. Some undulations besides here broke the dead level of the country. Altogether the position on that bank offered obvious possibilities for defence. On that account Maude had decided to launch his main assault across the Diala, but if there was an important diversion on the farther bank it could hardly fail, skilfully managed, to promote the chief design.

To begin with, therefore, a small column, detached from Marshall's force, was ferried over the Tigris in order to open from the other side of the main stream an enfilade fire upon the enemy's posts and batteries along the Diala; and half a mile below Bawi, that is, out of the range of the Turkish guns, the engineers, veiled by the first manœuvre, began (March 8) on the Tigris to throw a bridge across. The bridge was completed during the day, and the cavalry passed over followed by part of Cobbe's column. As at Ctesiphon, the country here also is cut up by nullahs and ancient ditches, some deep enough to be impassable until vamped by gangways of earth. Such work impeded progress, but the troops by nightfall had established contact with the enemy's outposts.

Coincidentally the efforts to cross the Diala were resumed. It was necessary to keep the Turks' attention divided between the two points. All day on March 8 the positions on the farther side of the tributary had been hammered by the British artillery. Then in the night troops tried to cross at four points. At three these



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attempts were defeated, but at the fourth, that farthest upstream and most distant from Bagdad, the ferry was worked for an hour before the enemy mustered in strength enough to stop it. By that time, however, a party of the Loyal North Lancashires had gained a footing in a bend of the bund on the farther bank, and, though heavily counter-attacked, isolated for the time being, and sniped perpetually from adjacent gardens and buildings, held on during the next twenty-two hours.

The operations now proceeded simultancously on both sides of the Tigris, and to follow their effect it is advisable to relate them as far as possible in the order of time.

On March 9 the cavalry with part of Cobbe's force drove the Turks out of the village of Shawa Khan and advanced to and attacked an entrenched position covering Bagdad from the south. The position, some six miles from the city, was strongly held and stubbornly defended. Under cover of darkness, however, the enemy retired from it to another entrenched line three miles to the rear. But on this day again a stiff wind arose, accompanied by a dust storm of unusual density. It tried the endurance of the British troops severely, but it appears to have tried the enemy to an equal degree, for learning that the British cavalry had worked round on his right flank, and had reached a point two miles west of Bagdad railway station, his troops again withdrew. This time they retreated north, not to Bagdad but beyond it. While the British cavalry went in pursuit, following the Turks four miles beyond Bagdad upstream, the infantry, having struck the single track railway from Bagdad to Feludja on the Euphrates, followed it until they reached the Bagdad terminus, and occupied the suburb on that bank.

This was just after daybreak on the morning of March 10. About an hour previously the crossing of the Diala had begun. To begin with, a stiff opposition appeared probable. Evidently, however, the news of the breakdown of the defence on the other side of the Tigris had filtered out and shaken the resistance. By seven in

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the morning the East Lancashires and Wiltshires had been ferried across, and enlarging the bridgehead held by the North Lancashires, enabled the work of bridging to be entered upon. By midday the bridge had been completed.

The hostile points of support on the farther side of the Diala were the villages of Saidah, Dibaiyi and Qaruarah, the last half-way between the Diala and Bagdad. Driven out of all three with heavy losses, the Turks lost, besides 300 prisoners, a large quantity of arms, munitions and equipment.

There now remained between the British force and Bagdad only the ridge of Tel-el-Mohammad. It was still held, and the intention was to assault it at dawn. But at half-past one in the morning patrols reported the enemy to be in retreat. A movement forward towards the ridge was accordingly at once made. The position was occupied with but slight resistance. The dust storm which covered the country on this side as well as on the other favoured the enemy's withdrawal.

Advancing nevertheless as rapidly as possible, General Marshall and his troops entered Bagdad early on March 11. The inhabitants welcomed them with every sign of satisfaction. For two hundred years the ancient capital of the Arabian Caliphs had been in the hands of the Turks. While its prestige remained as one of the Holy Places of the Moslem faith, and it was still of importance as an *entrepôt* on the overland trade route between India and the Levant by way of Persia, it had languished. Nor had the as yet incomplected railway materially aided the city's prosperity, for the line, as already noted, was a military rather than a commercial project. How, besides, was any solid prosperity to be built up on such a foundation as the Turkish system of government?

For the moment, however, the manifest pleasure of the population at the sight of the British was stimulated by the anarchy that prevailed, but now certain at once to be suppressed. During the preceding fortnight, beginning indeed forthwith on intelligence of the fall of

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Kut, the enemy had begun in Bagdad to remove his stores. The city formed his main advanced base, and the mass of material, having regard to the length and character of the Turkish communications, was too great to allow of transport, crippled besides now by the loss of his steamer flotilla. As much of it as could be was destroyed. But the process had been interrupted, with the result that much machinery, the plant of the railway workshops, materials for railway construction and repairs, rolling stock, cranes and winches, signal and telegraphic equipment, pipes and pumps, ice-making plant, soda water plant and hospital outfit had had, though in part damaged, to be left behind. Besides this were arms and munitions. Among the guns in the arsenal, in addition to cannon old and modern, were found those taken by the enemy at the surrender of Kut nearly a year before. These guns General Townshend had rendered useless. The reserve of small arms seized was very large. It was not merely the mass of the booty which signified, but the loss it represented to the enemy—a loss he could ill afford, and one that must in any event take no little time to repair. The blow had indeed been fatal to any successful prosecution of his campaign.

Clearly this destruction, entered upon when it was seen that owing to the rapidity of the British movements further removals had become impracticable, had incited the appetite for plunder among the irregulars who formed the camp following of the Turkish troops. No sooner therefore had the latter departed, if not before, than the hangers-on turned to sack habitations, despoil the residents, and loot the shops in the bazaars. At various points already they had started fires. With the arrival of the British troops they were caught red-handed. Guards had been formed to put down disorder and looting, and these sweeping through the several quarters of the city speedily rounded up the miscreants. Swift and summary, though even-handed, justice soon made every part of Bagdad at once tranquil and safe, and its normal life was resumed under a novel sense of



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security—that security of the British raj which is still the standing wonder of the East.

The British flag was hoisted over the Serail, the buildings of the Turkish provincial administration; the gunboat flotilla, steaming up line ahead, anchored off the British Residency. Well planned, ably executed, the offensive had proved a brilliant success.

## CHAPTER III

### MESOPOTAMIA CAMPAIGN AFTER THE CAPTURE OF BAGDAD

Effects of the Turkish reverses—Arab rising in the Yemen—General Maude's energetic measures—Advance up the Tigris—Cobbe's victory at Mushadiya—Advance along the Diala—Bakuba occupied—Marshall's operations on the Euphrates and capture of Feludja—Action on the Jebel Hamrin ridge—Turkish reaction—Combined movement against Deltawa—Maude's successful stratagem—Turks defeated—British victory at Istabulat—Capture of Samarra—The health and efficiency of the army—First operations against Ramadie—Why indecisive—Second Expedition—Battle of Ramadie—Capture of the Turkish force—Cavalry dash to Mendali—Results of British administration in Mesopotamia—Maude's death at Bagdad.

WITH the capture of Bagdad the aspect of affairs in Mesopotamia entirely changed, and the change, as it proved, was enduring. Not alone had Turkish prestige received a severe blow. The extent to which the resources of the Turks had been damaged became more apparent as time went on. When, threats apart, it was seen that the power effectually to react against the British did not in fact exist, opposition to German-Turkish schemes in Persia on the one side and among the Arabs of the Hedjaz on the other hardened. The Russian activities in Persia, resistant of the German-Turkish invasion, reached their high-water mark in the early part of 1917. But though from that time, owing to political troubles at home, they declined, and continued to decline, nevertheless, the earlier Turkish foothold in Persia, lost through the combined Russian and British pressure, could not be regained, and notwithstanding the completion of the strategical railway

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from Damascus to Mecca, the Turkish hold upon the Yemen was jeopardised. The Sheerif of Mecca proclaimed his independence.

While, however, there could hardly be a stronger contrast between the rational boldness of Maude's Expedition and the hesitation, alternating with haste, which had led to preceding failures, it had still to be presumed that the enemy remained capable of reacting. Steps had therefore to be taken, and without delay, to render the British hold upon Bagdad secure.

The three measures immediately and coincidentally necessary were first to make safe the British right upon the Diala, secondly to obtain control of the Tigris for a sufficient distance to the north, and thirdly to secure the British left by a move towards the Euphrates. Of these measures the second was perhaps the most urgent. The season marked by the annual melting of the snows in the Caucasian and Persian highlands, was close at hand. Both the great rivers of Mesopotamia then reach their highest level. In this annual rise and fall they resemble the Nile, and like the Nile used in ancient times to spread their waters far over the plain. The secret of the wonderful ancient fertility of Mesopotamia, these floods had been brought under control by the most extensive system of irrigation that has ever existed at any period or in any part of the world. All that remains of it are the traces which not even a thousand years of desolation and neglect have been able to efface. Most important among them are the bunds along the river banks. Since, however, the bunds have been worn down in places, the flood waters pour over, so that contiguous to these half-ruined bunds there are vast marshes, where the waters stagnate, while the rest of the country, subject to periodical and prolonged drought, is a desert. Since also of the two great rivers the Tigris, owing to its shorter course, is the more subject in the flood season to violent spates, often rising many feet in level in the course of a night, it was open to the enemy, having control of the bunds, to cut them. That, while immobi-

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lising the British force, to say nothing of the incidental consequences upon the health of the troops, would more than any other proceeding have assisted a hostile reaction.

On that account General Maude decided to act at once. Accordingly, having occupied Yahudie, 20 miles above Bagdad on the same bank, he pushed an advance guard of adequate strength as far as Kasirin, eight miles farther on. The Turks were given no time to rally, for the British appeared at Kasirin on April 14, three days after the entry into Bagdad. It was on the opposite side of the river, on the railway line to Samarra, that the enemy had taken up a position. Some five miles south of Mushadiya the railway ceases to follow the river, and for some 30 miles or more cuts across country, avoiding an extensive bend. This was the point where the Turks had elected to entrench. With the object primarily of protecting the bunds, General Cobbe was assigned the task of dislodging them. The manœuvre chosen was a night march, and it was coincident with the British advance on the Bagdad side, an advance with which it was reasonable to conclude the enemy's attention would be occupied.

Cobbe's march proved to be unopposed, and at day-break on April 14 his column came within sight of the Turkish entrenchments. The position had been selected by the enemy with skill. Just here the otherwise dead level of the country is broken by a range of sandhills. The highest are near the river, and the space between them and the great waterway cut up by canals and ditches. Entrenchment had added to the difficulty of those obstacles. The railway cuts through the sandhills, which farthest from the Tigris form a succession of undulations one ridge behind another. The entire front of the Turkish position was seven miles in extent. Not least among the features which gave it military value was the field of fire it commanded. Before it lay nothing save the bare plain.

Cobbe undoubtedly had before him a ticklish proposition. As usual, however, he made the best use of his

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resources. His decision was to throw the whole column against that part of the hostile line farthest from the river. Operating on the British left the cavalry were to work round upon the Turkish rear. The risk of these dispositions was that the enemy might counter-attack on the opposite wing, but Cobbe very properly judged that, owing to the coincident British advance on the Bagdad side of the Tigris, the risk in the circumstances was slight. On the other hand, his own movement threatened to push the Turkish right in the first instance parallel with the railway, and next off it, so that if successful the manœuvre would shepherd the hostile force into the bend and cut off their retreat.

Well supported by machine-gun fire, the cavalry movement was completely successful. The force worked round upon the enemy's rear as designed, and the effect was added to in no small measure by an enfilade bombardment of the Turkish defences by the river gunboats. At the same time a stiff artillery barrage was put down on the Turkish trenches on both sides of the railway. Notwithstanding this, the enemy kept up a brisk reply, fluctuating, but at times intense. Despite the tenacity of the resistance, however, Cobbe's infantry carried one ridge after another. Finally, in the afternoon all the defences had been won on the enemy's right, and there remained only his main position. The Black Watch and the Gurkhas, working in combination, were launched against it. The charge was brilliant. As the enemy stood to it and put up a fight at close quarters there was a grapple with bayonet and kukri. The struggle, though fierce, was brief. The Turkish casualties were heavy, and the position won by a clean cut. Fighting almost yard by yard, the remnant of the defending force fell back along the railway towards Mushadiya station. There, though darkness had meanwhile fallen, they rallied, and in the fitful light of a moon veiled every now and then by ragged clouds the battle went on. The British batteries, whipped up in all haste, had galloped forward over the sandhills; here and there some enemy guns still boomed

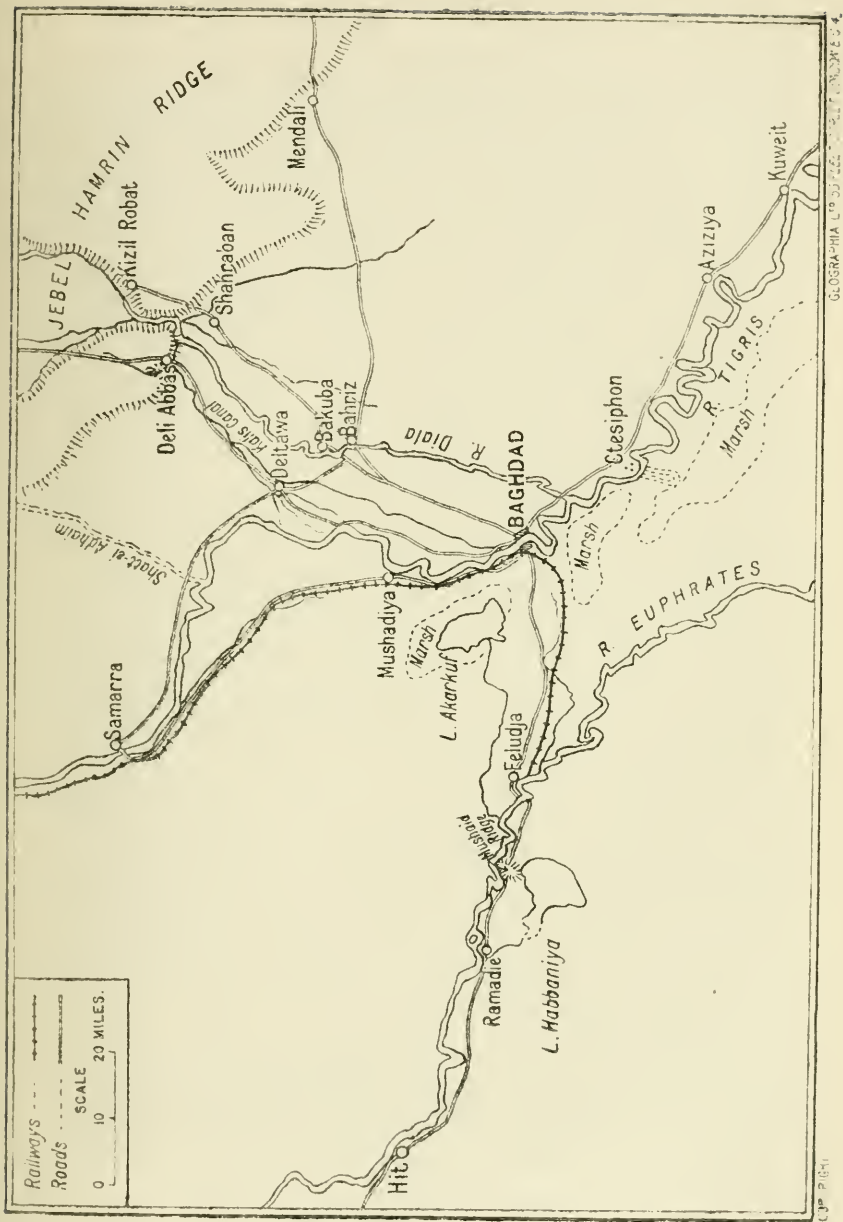


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in reply. The station buildings, loopholed for defence, formed a strong point of support. But the main body of the Black Watch and Gurkhas, having come up and recovered their second wind, at midnight closed in. The station was rushed. This time the Turkish retirement was a flight. The chase was kept up for half a mile north of the station, and then called off. The hostile force, however, had been so completely broken that next day nothing was seen of them. They were re-discovered by the airmen the day after that (April 16) retreating north in a straggling rout spread from front to rear over twenty miles of country. Even the rear-most stragglers were 25 miles north of Mushadiya. The van was nearly 45 miles away, and more than 50 from the site of the main battle. General Maude records that in these operations his troops displayed fine endurance and determination, and the praise, which from such a commander was praise indeed, was well deserved. They had marched and fought up to midnight on April 14 for thirty-six hours without a break, in that climate a rare feat of endurance. Nothing could better attest their magnificent *moral*.

The Tigris for a sufficient distance above Bagdad having been secured, it became easier to solidify the position on the Diala. Here the enemy still held Bakuba, 30 miles north-east of Bagdad and the centre of a cultivated area. The town, too, marked the junction of the roads from Samarra and Bagdad, with the route running north to Khanikin, and to seize the place meant severing the enemy's chief communications with Persia. Bakuba lies on the eastern bank of the Diala. A British post was established opposite the town on the western bank. While the garrison of Bakuba, not a large force, were thus expecting a direct attack, a British column, crossing the Diala five miles downstream at Bahriz, took Bakuba from the reverse direction, and no other way being open the Turks retreated north towards Khanikin. At this date the Russians under the command of General Baratoff, who had defeated the Turkish 13th





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Army Corps, were pushing on towards Kasr-i-Shirin with the intention at Khanikin of linking up with the British. Retreat upon Mosul by way of Bakuba cut off, the Turkish 13th Corps would be obliged to retire from Kasr-i-Shirin over the difficult mountain road to Kifri. The Turkish military organisation based upon Bagdad had gone to pieces.

While the move upon Bakuba was being made, another was taking place towards Feludja on the Euphrates. As a glance at the map will show, near to Bagdad the two great rivers of Mesopotamia swerve together, and the distance here separating them is not more than twenty miles. Since to command them is to command the communications of the country, it was evident that the occupation of Feludja was insistent. Nor can it be supposed that the enemy would not strongly have opposed this move had he been in a situation to do so. That it met with little opposition was the best possible proof of his difficulties.

The remarkable feature of the three movements just outlined is that they were all completed within a week of the British entry into Bagdad. That event had taken place on March 11; the occupation of Feludja, which completed General Maude's immediate threefold scheme, was effected on March 19. Bakuba had been taken on the preceding day.

Not merely was this display of energy, rounding off the occupation of Bagdad, noteworthy in itself, but it revealed the extent to which river transport had been improved, for though local supplies had been organised, the operations were still in the main dependent on Basra as the chief base and upon the traffic with that place. Any weakness at the base or on the line of supply must have led to delay, and time was here the essence of success.

A striking proof of the fact was speedily afforded. Some twenty miles to the north-east of Bakuba on the road to Khanikin is the little town of Shahraban. It was still occupied by the Turks. Following roughly the course of the Diala the road from Bagdad into Persia

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runs to the larger town of Kizil Robat, the first stage on the caravan journey. Kizil Robat lies in a kind of enclosed plain, an enclave in the highlands, and the Diala, falling from the higher mountains, after traversing this plain issues from it through a gorge or breach in the ridge which divides the enclosed level from the vast tracts of Mesopotamia to the south. The dividing ridge, called the Jebel Hamrin, was held by the enemy in considerable strength. Not alone did the position bar the road to Khanikin ; it formed a very convenient jumping-off place in the event of a reaction.

No sooner, therefore, had Feludja been secured, and the bunds north of Bagdad, when a column was concentrated at Bakuba, for further operations in that direction. Moving out on March 20, this force three days later drove the Turks out of Shahraban. The British found there large supplies of grain, part no doubt of the provision for the enemy's troops in Persia. Next day (March 24) they moved against the hostile position on the Jebel Hamrin ridge. The country just here at the foot of the higher levels, still cut up in all directions by ditches and canals, was by no means easy to cross, but in a night attack a hold was established on the foothills. The ridge of Jebel Hamrin is rugged. Beyond the foothills is the first crest, then, at a distance of some two miles, but two miles seamed by ravines and hummocks, rises a second and higher crest. The first and lower crest was also gained. Behind the lower crest the enemy line ran across the broken country about a thousand yards to the north and at the foot of the higher rise. In the circumstances it was not judged advisable to press the advance further. Seeing the British retiring, the Turks came out into the open, and at the same time their cavalry, riding through the gorge of the Diala, tried to envelop the British right. That wing was held by the Manchesters. The Turkish horse charged in the hope of breaking them up, but standing with exemplary steadiness they withered the onset with volleys of rifle and machine-gun fire poured in at close quarters.

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Since the enemy's 13th Corps were in difficulties, the 18th was sent to their aid, and the British having fallen back upon Shahraban, there appeared to be some prospect of avoiding the long and toilsome detour through Kifri by getting out through Kizil Robat and Deltawa, the latter place being on the route to Samarra. By this time, however, Deltawa had been taken by a British detachment. An attempt by part of the 13th Corps to advance from Kizil Robat to Deltawa was made, but it was beaten, and the enemy fell back upon Deli Abbas, followed up by the British cavalry.

To assist the proposed retirement of the 13th Corps from Persia by way of the Tigris, the 18th was drawn up behind the Shatt-el-Adhaim, a tributary of the Tigris flowing in across the flats from the north-east.

A converging movement against the British at Deltawa was evidently the intention. As usual, General Maude resolved to strike first. His plan was, while containing the Deli Abbas force with his cavalry, to attack with a sufficiently strong mobile column the 18th Turkish Corps, who by this time had crossed the Shatt-el-Adhaim. That the hostile intention had been rightly interpreted was shown on March 27 by a determined effort to open the road to Deltawa from Deli Abbas. Harassed by the British cavalry, skilfully handled, the movement was checked, and the Turks, having sustained severe losses, finally fell back, the British cavalry in pursuit.

On the receipt apparently of intelligence that a column was on the march against him, the commander of the 18th Corps deemed it prudent to entrench and await the onset near Himma on the main road to Deltawa from the north-west. His position had been well chosen. On the British side a night assault was determined upon, and took place after darkness on March 28. The fighting proved stubborn. At noon on the following day the action was still undecided. Hostilities had then to be suspended because of a mirage. The phenomenon, falsifying the whole aspect of the country, left

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artillery support out of the question. At sunset, however, the mirage passed off. The renewed British attack then carried most of the hostile positions. Counter-attacks were fierce. They added so heavily to the Turkish losses that during the night (March 29-30) what were still left of the defences were abandoned, and the 18th Corps retired across the Shatt-el-Adhaim.

Owing to this defeat of the 18th Corps, the Turks on the upper Diala had now no alternative left save to retreat through Kifri, and on April 2 at Kizil Robat, evacuated by the enemy, the British effected a junction with the troops of General Baratoff.

General Maude now judged it advisable to push his operations yet farther along the Tigris on both banks. The remains of the 13th and 18th Turkish Corps had each been reinforced. His first purpose was to move along the railway towards Samarra, and on April 9 the advance had been carried as far as Harbe. But meanwhile on the other bank the 2nd and 14th Turkish Divisions again made a move towards Deltawa. They came down from Deli Abbas along the Nahr Kalis canal, which, running diagonally across country, links up the Tigris with the Diala. On this occasion, keeping their left flank close to the canal, the Turkish formation was in dense columns, a manœuvre designed to resist attack by cavalry. As before also, the British mounted troops appeared to oppose the enemy's progress, but though this opposition was supported by Horse Artillery, which inflicted rather heavy losses on the close masses, it could not arrest them, for the cavalry were not able to come to close quarters. In a word, the manœuvre looked like being a success, and on April 9 these Turkish troops had pushed forward seven miles. Whether or not the enemy presumed that the British dispositions would remain as before; that the main British force would continue on the Shatt-el-Adhaim, and the movement upon Deltawa from the north-east be resisted as hitherto merely by cavalry, can only be inferred, but clearly the attack upon Deltawa from the north-east was the serious



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thing, and the enemy force on the Shatt-el-Adhaim intended in the interim to keep the British there occupied. At all events General Maude concluded that these were the hostile intentions, and as events proved, his judgment was justified. He met stratagem with stratagem. Screening the movement with his cavalry, still offering an apparently futile opposition, he detached part of the supports of his troops on the Shatt-el-Adhaim, and marching them across country by night, had them the following morning on the exposed right of the Turks moving down by the Nahr Kalis canal. Looking, as they were, for nothing more than continued cavalry skirmishes, this assault by infantry and field guns took the Turks wholly by surprise. Obligated hastily to deploy in the open to meet it, they lost heavily. In face of the casualties and confusion there was nothing for it save to retreat. The pursuit was continued as far as Deli Abbas, from which place the enemy was ejected.

Though on a small scale these operations afford an instructive example of skill in manœuvre.

The thrust from Deli Abbas disposed of, General Maude turned his attention once more to the 18th Corps. On April 18 the Shatt-el-Adhaim was bridged. When that had been accomplished and the British infantry had crossed the river the Turks began to fall back. But a composite brigade of cavalry was launched in chase, and the retreat rapidly became a rout. Losing 1,300 prisoners, in addition to killed and wounded, the 18th Corps was broken up. Only a small fraction of the troops composing it made good their escape.

There was now on the Bagdad side of the river no longer for the time being any Turkish force of any consequence. On the opposite side, however, towards Samarra, the enemy still had troops reported to consist of some 10,700 infantry, about 700 cavalry, and 46 guns, based upon Samarra with an advanced position among the ruins of Istabulat. Not the strength of the force was the problem, but the position chosen. The great bend in the course of the Tigris, avoided as it were by



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the railway, is also for the purposes of river transport shortened by the Dujail canal. That cut leaves the Tigris not far below Samarra at an acute angle, runs fairly straight across country, and strikes the river again some ten miles above Bagdad. In places the canal is carried between high embankments, and the railway is laid roughly parallel with it on the west side. Extending from the Tigris to the canal near their junction at Samarra, and where the distance between the two is some three miles, the Turkish line cut off a triangle of ground fairly secure at all events on the land side, for the canal embankments were there some forty feet in height. And attack, too, was difficult from the river because of the hairpin turn at the point where the enemy's left rested on the waterway. His right, on reaching the canal embankment, was carried along it. The position was a strong one.

On the part of the British, when the advance had been carried as far as Istabulat (April 21) the plan was first to attack the Turkish line facing downstream at the end where it rested on the river, and at the opposite end where it adjoined the canal. At the latter point those old comrades in arms the Black Watch and the Gurkhas, moving forward together, covered by a creeping barrage, secured a firm footing in the defences. Near the river the Turks at the same time lost the redoubt which had formed one of their main points of support. These breaches having been made on that front, the line along the canal embankment was attacked by the Seaforth Highlanders and the 28th and 92nd Punjabis. They had to advance in the open across more than a mile of exposed ground, but, displaying the greatest gallantry, broke the hostile line over a width of 700 yards. The resistance had been tenacious, and it was still possible owing to the natural and artificial strength of the position to defend it. Content therefore for the time being with the breaches effected, the British commander prepared methodically to push the attack from these jumping-off points under the cover of darkness. Possibly this purpose was suspected, for soon after

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darkness the Turks, whose losses had been even more severe than supposed, began an evacuation.

At daybreak the whole British force was on the move in pursuit. The chase, continued as far as Samarra, resulted in the capture of 14 Krupp guns, 16 locomotives, 240 trucks, 2 barges, and, besides numerous rifles, a large stock of ammunition and miscellaneous equipment. Samarra station was captured on April 23 and the town occupied on April 24.

Aerial reconnaissance now left it beyond doubt that the enemy retirement was general on both banks of the river. Into the details of the clearing up it is not necessary to enter. Suffice it to say that Sir Stanley Maude had not merely in taking Bagdad scored a political success; he had in breaking up the Turko-German power in Mesopotamia won a solid military triumph.

But it had been a trying campaign for the British troops. The distances to be covered, the heat, the dust storms, the scarcity on occasions of water, called for physical exertion of no ordinary kind. Nevertheless, as their gallant General recorded, "the spirit of the troops seemed to rise as conditions became more trying, and to the end of this period they maintained the same high standard of discipline, gallantry in action, and endurance."

There were now before them five months of hot weather during which active campaigning was impracticable. While no necessary precautions were neglected, most were withdrawn into reserve and distributed along the river in camps, "where a liberal supply of water for drinking, bathing and washing was obtainable." In camp manly sports were encouraged, training carried on in the early mornings and late evenings when the weather was cool enough, and to long service men periods of leave granted to India. Coincidentally the defensive arrangements and organisation securing the British occupation of the country were strengthened and completed.

The Turks still remained in occupation of Ramadie

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on the Euphrates. They had there some 1,500 regular and 2,000 irregular troops, the latter Arabs of the Delaim tribe. Ramadie is rather more than twenty miles up the Euphrates from Feludja, and on the opposite bank. Between the two places near the point where the Saklawiya canal leaves the river, there are some hummocks of rising ground called Sinn-el-Zibban. These it was judged advisable to occupy, and it was determined to carry out both that move and an attack upon Ramadie early in July. Since it was out of the question to execute long marches in the summer heats, both motor vans and lorries were provided to carry a part of the Column, so that men might alternately march and ride, and very careful provision was made as regarded the supply of water and of ice. Setting out from Feludja, an advance guard on July 8 occupied Sinn-el-Zibban. While they made exact reconnaissances towards Ramadie, twelve miles farther on, the main Column was concentrated behind the mounds. The march from Sinn-el-Zibban to Ramadie took place on the night of July 10. By four the following morning contact had been established with the enemy's advance posts and these driven in. The operations, however, were at this point interrupted by a dust storm of unusual severity, accompanied by a heat wave, and those conditions continued until July 14. In the circumstances the contemplated attack had to be abandoned. The Column withdrew to Sinn-el-Zibban.

But the enterprise was not given up. On the contrary, preparations were made to carry it through on a larger scale, for it was now certain that the enemy, put upon the alert, would as speedily as possible reinforce his garrison. Preparations occupied the interval until September 26. Their effect showed that little time after all had been lost. The end of September was the beginning of the campaigning season.

Like that at Istabulat on the Tigris, the position at Ramadie lent itself to effective defence. The reach of the Euphrates from Ramadie to Feludja runs west to east. South of the course of the river, and distant

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from it between five and eight miles, there is an extensive salt lake, the Habbaniya. A mile or so west of Ramadie a canal, the Aziziya, leaves the Euphrates and follows a southerly direction until lost in the salt marsh at its western end. Near the eastern end of the marsh, and extending south to north from lake to river is the Mushaid ridge, some 60 feet in height. There were therefore three ways of arriving at the town; first by crossing the Euphrates at some point between the Mushaid ridge and the Aziziya canal; secondly by assaulting and capturing the ridge; thirdly by making a detour to the west and forcing a passage over the canal.

In view of these features of the area the Turkish commander held the Mushaid ridge with part of his force as an advance guard, but realising that from the west there might be delivered an attack which, if successful, would cut off his retreat he kept the main body of his troops on a front drawn closely round the east and south of the town. The ground there, between the Euphrates and the salt lake, was an expanse of bare sandy downs—the Aziziya canal on one side, and the Euphrates Valley canal, roughly parallel with the river, on the other.

The British plan was this: In the first place measures were taken for leading the Turkish General to believe that the chief attack was to take place from across the river. A road was laid down along the opposite bank, and supplies were collected at the most convenient point for crossing. Rather lower downstream a bridge of boats had been constructed, and over this part of the British column passed from the Ramadie side to the farther bank. Such were the preparations up to the evening of September 27.

During that night, however, these troops were withdrawn and recrossed the Euphrates. The real attack was to be delivered at the southern end of the Mushaid ridge where that hummock abutted on the lake. The cavalry were to move forward as far as the road from Ramadie to Hit and Aleppo, and cut the enemy's communications.



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At dawn on September 28 the southern end of the Mushaid ridge was attacked, and a foothold on that part won. The Euphrates Valley canal runs past the rise at this southern end. Across the canal a dam had been constructed broad enough for the passage of both troops and guns. The dam was secured, and a body of British infantry marched over.

The ridge had now been turned, as intended, and that fact led the enemy to evacuate the rise and fall back upon his defences among the sand dunes. The British infantry followed him up along the northern shore of the lake. Their movement screened by the Mushaid ridge, the cavalry manoeuvred to the left wing of the advance, and while the infantry, supported by the guns, approached and opened an attack upon the southern face of the enemy's main position, the horse, crossing the Aziziya canal near its junction with the lake, wheeled to the north and made for the Aleppo road. The effect of this move lay in its rapidity. Quite possibly the enemy may have supposed that to deliver an attack from the west it would be necessary to make a detour round the lake, a distance of at least thirty miles. Such a movement would not only have occupied a whole day, it would have left the mounted force too exhausted for further immediate operations. Thus there appeared to be a loophole, but when, instead, the British cavalry cut across the northern edge of the lake, a distance of not more than ten miles, they not only arrived west of the Aziziya canal fully fit for further activity, but saved a whole day.

And this manoeuvre was accompanied by another complementary of it. The infantry had pushed on from the Mushaid ridge in two columns, the Column on the left slightly in advance. It was the Left Column which opened the assault. Aided by the character of the ground the enemy's opposition was stiff. All the same, the Left Column seized part of the defences and consolidated the position. In these operations, though all the troops engaged displayed admirable gallantry, the Dorsets and 5th Gurkhas particularly distinguished

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themselves and earned a mention in despatches. By this time it was early evening, and as the action had begun at dawn, and the troops had been on foot during part of the preceding night, the assault was not further pressed. If the enemy was left under the impression that his resistance had been in the main successful, so much the better. When darkness came on, the Right Column passing in rear was transferred to the left of the line, and at dawn delivered a renewed attack along the Aziziya embankment. They made good their footing.

As it stood on the evening of September 28 the situation was that the Turkish force occupied a triangle, the northern side of it the bank of the Euphrates; the south-eastern side, his line across the sand dunes; the south-western, what was still left of his defences along the Aziziya canal. His only possible way out, therefore, was through Ramadie, at the north-western corner, along the Aleppo road. The Aleppo road, however, was now obstructed by the British cavalry, while on the south-east face and part of the south-west of his main position he was held by the infantry.

It is not surprising in the circumstances that retreat had been resolved upon. Evidently it was believed that the Turkish troops could still break through the British cavalry. At three in the morning the Turks in massed formation debouched from Ramadie on the Aleppo road. The fight was hot, for the effort to break through was resolute. But the British horse, besides exhibiting great dash in attack, were strongly supported by Horse Artillery and batteries of Hotchkiss guns. The enemy's losses were severe. After the fighting had gone on for an hour and a half and it became plain that no retreat could be effected save as a rout, he withdrew again into the town.

While these events to the west were in progress the attack of the British infantry was resumed and delivered against the south-eastern face of the triangle and along the embankment of the canal. By half-past seven in the morning the 39th Garhwalis seized the



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bridge carrying the Aleppo route over the canal. The Turks in Ramadie were now sealed up.

The attack was pressed from this west side of the town. During the struggle for the bridge—the Turks posted to defend it fought to the last and those not killed or wounded were taken prisoners—the 90th Punjabis entered Ramadie, and, pushing eastwards, reached the Turkish headquarters. There the enemy commander, Ahmed Bey, surrendered. No formal capitulation occurred. It had become a question of rounding up the remnants of the Turkish force, demoralised alike by the rapidity of the onset and its developments. An hour before noon all had been made prisoners. There were 3,454.

More important, however, than the prisoners were the captures of material. These included railway material and supplies; engineering stores; reserves of arms and munitions; two barges and two armed launches; and 13 guns besides machine-guns. The captures were important because they crippled ability to prosecute the campaign. Transport of military equipment from Aleppo to places on the Euphrates was both slow and difficult. Under the most favourable conditions months would have to elapse before the enemy could make good this loss.

Simultaneously with the operations at Ramadie the cavalry with the British forces on the Bagdad side of the Tigris had by a bold move from Deltawa through Bakuba struck north-east to Mendali on the Persian border. This small town, a Turkish frontier post lying at the foot of the Pusht-i-Kuh mountains, had been used as a minor base of supplies, and had proved of value in organising raids on the Tigris line of communications. The British cavalry dash, though it meant a ride of more than sixty miles, was accomplished for the most part during the night of April 28–29. Surprised by the apparition of these mounted troops, early in the morning of April 29 the Turks holding Mendali attempted no resistance, and fled at once into the hills. But they had been given no time to make away with the

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supplies the town contained. Among the most useful captures were 300 baggage camels. This stroke disposed of the last vestige of Turkish force in Mesopotamia between Ramadie on the one side and Kifri on the other.

Not alone, however, had Turkish power been abolished; British authority substituted for it had been steadily consolidated. The work of re-organisation initiated at Basra was beginning to show fruit, and was reflected alike in the health and efficiency of the army of occupation and in the regularity of the administration and resultant tranquillity.

Above all, the river transport had continued to improve. At the same time, additional lines of railway had been laid down. Extended though they had been, the facilities afforded by the port of Basra had become insufficient. They were accordingly further enlarged by the construction of a supplemental port on lines advised by a Committee on the spot.

Looking at it as a whole, the work achieved by Sir Stanley Maude had been as thorough as it had been brilliant. On his arrival the Turkish power appeared to have entered upon a new lease of vitality. He had done more than destroy it; building upon the foundations of his predecessors Nixon and Lake, who, though their tasks had been left unfinished, had proceeded on sound principles, he had reared a solid structure. The army was efficient and in good health; the native population content. Diseases like cholera, enteric, scurvy and dysentery, which had taken a heavy toll of the troops during the earlier stages of the campaign, had been reduced to a minimum or stamped out. It is not alone fertility and brilliance of resource which mark out the commander of genius; it is the capacity incidentally of taking infinite pains as to details.

Maude had toiled hard; how hard few save his subordinates knew. It was his unfailing care which led to his untimely decease, a public calamity hardly to be estimated, for the needs of war had in him discovered a great soldier. Though in the camps cholera cases had become few, there were spots in the country

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where among the civil population the scourge lingered. Keenly concerned in the measures for dealing with it, the General made a tour of these districts. The gratitude of the inhabitants was marked.

At the conclusion of this tour General Maude attended at Bagdad a fête at which most of the influential residents of the city assisted. The function, a performance of "Hamlet" by scholars of the Jewish school, had been arranged in his honour. In accordance with native custom coffee was set before him, and as a sign of regard for English usages, sugar and milk. The General drank the coffee after having diluted it with the milk. Next day he had the symptoms of acute cholera. In five days he was dead. He had refused inoculation, considering it in his own case and at his age—he was fifty-four—unnecessary. Unwittingly he had sealed his work with his life. Outside the Old North Gate of the city he was buried with the military honours he had so well won, his burial place surrounded by men who, having shared with him the perils and fatigues of battle and rejoiced with him in victory, now mourned him as a great, fearless, and kindly spirit, the true type of the British soldier. The Command in Mesopotamia was placed in the capable hands of General Marshall. To earlier distinctions General Marshall had just added the conduct of the operations at Ramadie.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CAMPAIGN IN SYRIA : JANUARY TO OCTOBER, 1917

Offensive in support of Mesopotamia operations—Battle of El Arish—British advance to Rafa—Physical features of southern Syria—Turkish defences in Palestine—Haste of the British preparations—First British attack upon Gaza—Reasons for its defeat—Plans of General Allenby—Their daring—Naval co-operation—Three months of preparation—Mastery of the physical difficulties of Sinai—The water problem—Increase of the British Expeditionary Force—Enemy's counter-moves.

FOLLOWING the repulse of the second Sinai enterprise in June and July, 1916, no further German-Turkish attempt took place against the Suez Canal defences. Nevertheless the enemy remained in possession of El Arish on the coast, and therefore within easy striking distance should his affairs elsewhere warrant renewal of activity. His handicap, as always, was non-command of the sea. The length of the Turkish line of communication between Constantinople and El Arish was more than 1,300 miles. Had the Germans and Turks been able from Smyrna, or even from Alexandretta, to send troops and supplies by sea, then their projects against Egypt would forthwith have become formidable. But, the sea closed to them, they had, to begin with, to forward supplies from Constantinople to Bozanti over 700 miles of a single-track railway, and at Bozanti, on the northern and inland side of the Cilician Taurus, the tunnel intended to pierce that great range of mountains was unfinished. Every ton of supplies had therefore to be unloaded and hauled either on narrow-gauge trucks or on motor-lorries and reloaded on to the railway south of the range. And at Amanus, one hundred miles

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farther on, there was another mountain mass, another unfinished tunnel, and another and similar transshipment. This route, too, had not only to serve the German-Turkish force in Palestine; it had at the same time to meet the needs and demands of the enemy troops in Mesopotamia, and in Arabia. Nor was that all. To the defects of the line were added shortage of rolling stock. There was not merely not enough of it—want of foresight in Turkish administration here made itself felt—but what there was of it had fallen into bad repair. Further, because of the lack of coal, the locomotives had to be run with wood fuel, and frequent stoppages took place to fill up the tenders. Those stoppages led to congestion. Between Ahmed Jemal Pasha, Governor of Syria, who was in charge of the communications south of the Taurus, and the Germans both at Constantinople and on the spot, bad blood had become chronic. Because of congestion of traffic, troops had frequently to be detrained far to the north of Damascus and marched to the south of Palestine on foot. When this was the state of things is it surprising that German-Turkish expeditions against Egypt failed to prosper? The handicap notwithstanding, the presence of the Turks in the Sinai peninsula formed an unpleasant menace.

In January, 1917, the success of General Maude's operations against Kut, combined with the suppression of the movement led by the Senussi of Sollum on the west, influenced the British Government to pass in Sinai to the offensive. Assuming it to be successful, the offensive would both assist the British attack in Mesopotamia and safeguard Egypt.

Accordingly, towards the end of January the forces under the command of Sir Archibald Murray moved against the enemy at El Arish and gained a complete victory. The Turkish garrison there was destroyed and its stores and equipment captured.

So rapid a stroke had not been looked for. Preparations, too, had been made for pushing the British advance as far as Rafa, and for supporting it by the construction of a light railway. Rafa is on the coast at the extreme



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north-east corner of Sinai, and just within the nominal Egyptian boundary.

Covered by Australian Light Horse and by Camelry, the march along the coast route was swift. The British force could move comparatively light since it was able to rely upon accompanying shipping for supplies. Rafa was reached and seized before the enemy could reinforce. In possession of that important post the British in laying their line of railway were secure against molestation. They were thus able to convert Rafa into an advanced base.

But the enemy naturally had also made the best use of the interval. While contemplating attack upon Egypt, he had not neglected to provide against the possibility of counter-attack. All the more had he been urged towards those precautions because of past failures.

To follow the operations in Syria it is necessary to note the leading physical features of the southern area of that great province. The district of Palestine contiguous to the Mediterranean is a long, narrow plain. East of this plain, inland and roughly parallel with the coast, is a broad ridge of tableland, its surface undulated. Its western face towards the plain is scored by defiles, for the most part with steep and rocky declivities. In the rainy season these wadis, as they are called, are the beds of roaring torrents; in the dry season tracks of broken rocks and stones. Roads practicable for wheeled traffic from the coastal plain to the highlands are few. The main cross route of that character runs from Jaffa to Jerusalem.

East of the Palestine ridge occurs the strange profound trough of Jordan, the Dead Sea, nearly 1,300 feet below sea level, marking its lowest depth. The abrupt drop from the Palestine ridge into this valley is in places 2,000 feet. On the farther side of the valley rises the western face of the great plateau of Moab. To the south the trough is continued towards the Red Sea, dividing the arid uplands of Arabia from those of Sinai.



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At the southern end of the Palestine ridge the coastal plain broadens and extends inland. The depression, fertile and under cultivation, marks Palestine off from the desert of Sinai, to the south-west. This level expanse is also itself marked off from the Palestine ridge by the wadi or valley of the Ghuzze, a considerable river which skirts round the southern foot of the ridge, from Beersheba to the Mediterranean. From the valley of the Ghuzze at a point about ten miles from the coast branches off to north-east the Wadi es Sheria. Between the two valleys there is a triangle of rugged country. The peculiarity of these wadis is their perpendicular sides. They are less valleys in the ordinary sense of the word than broad cracks worn by the water in the stony soil, and were military obstacles of some difficulty.

Situated at the point of an outlying westerly spur of the Palestine ridge, and where the coastal plain is narrowest, Gaza forms a kind of gateway barring advance from Sinai to the north. Gaza had been converted into a fortress of the first class, surrounded by earthworks among the sand dunes lying between the town and the coast, and by works on the heights behind it. All these defences were heavily wired in. But along the spur extending inland, and in the triangle of country between the Wadi es Sheria and the Wadi Ghuzze, other defences had been laid out. They extended indeed as far as Beersheba, nearly thirty miles from the sea. To Beersheba there is a mule track from Rafa, and then through the hills northwards to Hebron a mountain road, but too rugged for wheeled traffic. It is not until Hebron, twenty-five miles north of Beersheba, is reached that this road, continued to Jerusalem, becomes practicable for vehicles. Beersheba owes its existence to its wells.

Formerly the road from Gaza to Beersheba was as indifferent as that from Beersheba to Hebron, but to link up the various defences the Turks had, under the supervision of German engineers, converted the Gaza-Beersheba track into an excellent motor route,

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well paved and greatly straightened. It was a laborious and expensive piece of work, but, as a lateral communication, of great military utility.

An attack upon such a system of defences perched on a range of rugged hills and with a river in front of them was a serious undertaking ; doubly so if they were held in strength. Nor could attack hope to succeed without adequate preparation.

The preparations were hurried, and from two causes :

First, not yet understanding the thoroughness of General Maude's work in Mesopotamia, and looking rather to the occupation of Bagdad and its political effects than to the destruction of the enemy's military resources, there was on the part of the British Government at home what proved to be an unwarranted apprehension as to the possibilities of a Turkish reaction. The real conditions governing the campaign in Mesopotamia were not fully grasped. Nor was it yet realised that Maude was tearing up Turkish power in Mesopotamia by the roots. It was judged, therefore, advisable to push the operations in Syria with all speed as one preventive of a Turkish rebound in the north.

Secondly, the rapid success of the Syria operations up to this point had bred, just as those of Townshend had done, confidence where there ought to have been caution. The difficulties on the spot were under-rated.

Thus hastened, the attack on the Palestine defences took place in April. Not caring to hazard his force far from the coast, having regard to its distance from Egypt proper and its dependence upon seaborne supplies, Sir Archibald Murray formed the plan of directing his main onset against Gaza, and of assisting it by a diversion along the Wadi Ghuzze, by that means covering his right flank. The enemy's tactics, it turned out, were at Gaza to stand upon the defensive, and to throw the chief weight of a Turkish counter-thrust against the British right. It mattered little even should the British get into Gaza ; they could not remain there if the Turks on the British right succeeded in cutting in between the Expeditionary Force and the Rafa

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base. In fact, if the British could not fight their way out of Gaza they would be entrapped. These tactics of the enemy were bold, but sound.

The assault upon Gaza met with what appeared to be complete success. The defences facing south-west were carried by storm, and the troops penetrated into the town. But the mobile column covering the British right, hopelessly outnumbered, could not resist the weight of the enemy force thrown against it. As the Turkish commander had shrewdly foreseen, Gaza had hastily to be evacuated. The British were compelled to fall back, attacked both in flank and rear. Nothing indeed but the valour of the troops saved the situation, and nothing but the Turks' heavy losses prevented the enemy from pressing his advantage right home. This was a British failure, however, and an expensive one. For three days, during which the British slowly fell back, the Turks spared no effort. It was the reckless character of their attacks which in the end frustrated their design. While obliged to retire upon the lines from which they had set out in this phase of the operations, and for the time being immobilised there, the British had so far punished the enemy that he too was forced to remain inactive. That state of things lasted throughout the next three months.

The Commandership-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was transferred to General Sir E. H. H. Allenby, marked out by his achievements in the campaign in France. He had orders, on arriving in Egypt at the end of June, 1917, to report on the conditions under which offensive operations against the Turks in Palestine might be resumed during the ensuing autumn or winter. His proposals, which were approved, were submitted after a visit to the front and a personal examination of the position.

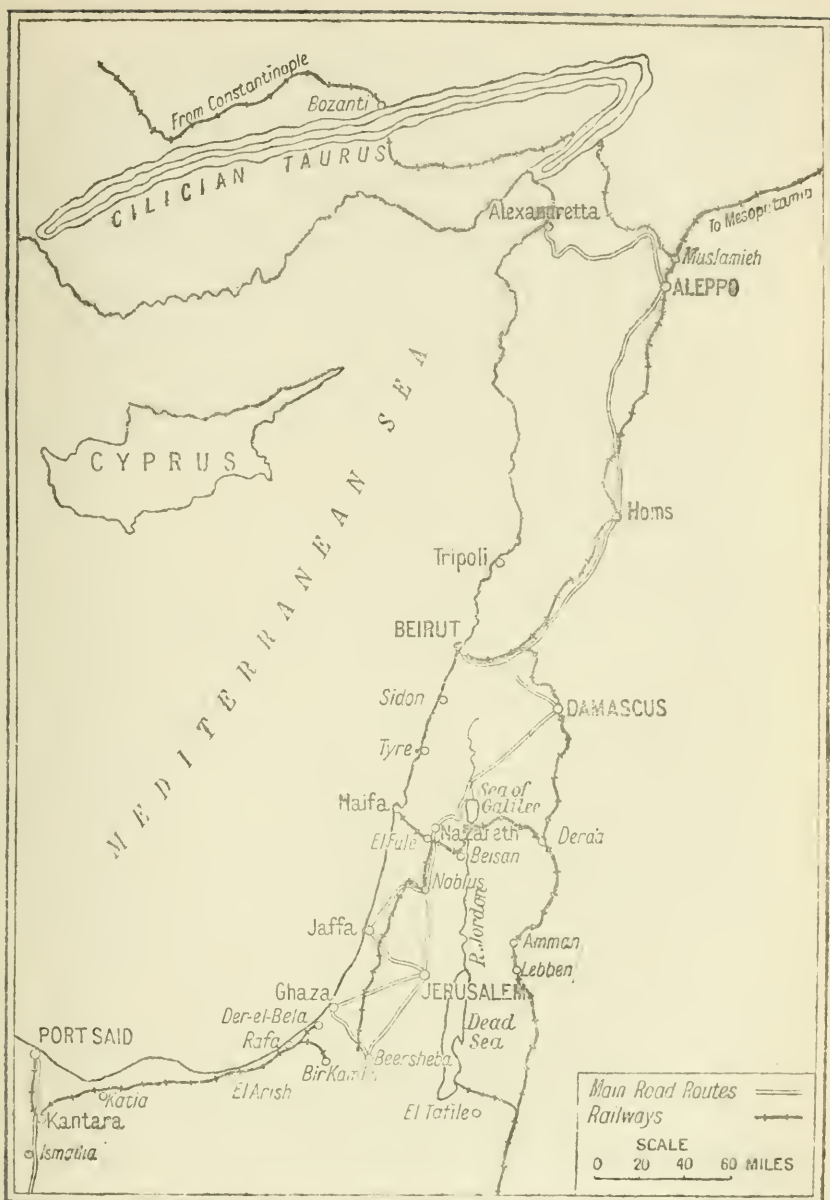
In the meanwhile the obstacles to be overcome had grown more formidable. Between Gaza and Beersheba the enemy had constructed six groups of works, each in a commanding tactical position. Distant from each other by not more than 2,000 yards, and therefore

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capable of mutual support, the interlying groups or systems were at Sihan, Atawineh, Baha, Abu Hareira, Rushdi and Ruweika. The excellent lateral communications between Gaza and Beersheba appeared to render all the defences yet more secure. Nevertheless, to increase insurance the enemy had not only in the interval linked up the groups by lines of trenches, thus presenting an uninterrupted front, but had raised his force to nine divisions of infantry and one of cavalry, a total of some 180,000 men. Assuredly to attack such a line of fortifications with a numerically smaller force looked on the face of it an impossible undertaking.

Separated as they were from Egypt proper by the whole width of the Sinai desert, the British troops were at this time limited as regards numbers by the supplies which could be transported, and they were not less limited by the water problem. Indeed the problem of water was the more difficult of the two. One object of the enemy had been to keep the British Force in a position where wells were few. He on his side had no water question to contend against. His communications too were, though not good, the more adequate. There was the main railway from Damascus to rely upon. A branch of that line extended down to Jaffa, and the railhead there had been linked by a military light railway with Gaza. Another branch of the main railway was east of Jordan carried south along the plateau of Moab, past the Dead Sea and on to the Yemen, with Mecca as its southern terminus. Had it been presently or prospectively a commercial project this line would assuredly have been laid along the inhabited districts of the plateau close by the ancient north and south road, some ten miles on an average east of the Dead Sea shores on that side. The line, however, had been constructed another twenty miles or more on the average farther east through desert solitudes, public utility being sacrificed to security against attack.

A commander less resolute than General Allenby might well have been deterred by these prospects.





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But a study of the situation had revealed just one weak place in the hostile dispositions. Between the Ruweika defences and those round Beersheba there was a gap of some four and a half miles. This stretch of the country was lofty and rugged, so rugged that regular fortification would have been superfluous. Nevertheless the possibility at any rate existed, if the defences of Beersheba could be seized, of turning the enemy's left flank, and of delivering the real attack upon Gaza from the east and north-east; that is, of turning also the main defences of the fortress. Assuming success, followed up with sufficient rapidity, an advantage of this plan was that the Turkish forces holding the interlying systems of defences, if not cut off, would be forced to evacuate them. Further, the capture of the wells at Beersheba would go far towards easing the water difficulties.

To ensure success, however, the attack upon Beersheba would have to be carried out as a surprise, and to make it a surprise a feint assault had to be arranged against Gaza in the first instance, so that the enemy reserves might not be transferred to the opposite extreme of the line.

The plan was daring, but this was a situation in which, above all, resource was called for. One advantage of the British over the enemy was the larger proportion of mobile and mounted troops. Uncovered by the capture of the Beersheba defences, the enemy's left flank would be exposed, and the attack might be developed with a speed affording the Turks no opportunity to rally. The defences at Beersheba were, too, not only easier to approach than any of the others, but less elaborate and formidable. Apparently it had been supposed that the British would not venture upon so wide a detour.

Another circumstance which contributed to mislead the hostile command was the support of the British Expedition by the Naval squadron under the orders of Rear-Admiral T. Jackson. That able and alert officer and his staff worked in the closest conjunction with

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the land forces. An assault upon Gaza, prepared for and backed by the guns of the warships, was not an operation the Turks could afford to take lightly.

In the meantime it was evident that the whole success or failure of the British scheme turned upon arrangements for transport and the supply of the main attacking force. On setting out, the force would have to carry with it supplies for at least six days. The force having to operate over country without roads practicable for wheeled traffic, these supplies must be carried upon pack animals.

The preparations occupied the months of July, August and September. They were the first matter to which, having broadly estimated the situation and its chances, General Allenby gave his mind. Here not less than in Mesopotamia a solid and sufficient administration was the basis of success. Administration—transport and the supply of day-to-day necessities—makes up three-fourths of the work of any army in the field. Without it the most brilliant skill in leadership is thwarted and the steadiest valour brought to naught. To launch an offensive in Palestine unless and until the difficulties of Sinai had been overcome would be more than rash. Soberly speaking, it was not to be thought of. Happily, to the Government at home both the check met with at Gaza and Maude's work in Mesopotamia had been enlightening. They were no longer disposed either to scamp preparations or to grudge the force deemed to be necessary. The manner in which in these circumstances the difficulties of the Sinai route were mastered is worthy of record. It ranks among the most remarkable achievements of the war.

To begin with, there was the work at Kantara. That place fulfilled in the campaign in Syria the function which Basra did in the operations in Mesopotamia. Until May, 1917, Kantara was a mere post on the east bank of the Suez Canal, surrounded by wastes of sand. But out of the wastes now rose railway, ordnance and engineering shops completely equipped. Along the banks of the canal were built broad quays where great

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liners discharged their cargoes. A military terminus with a gridiron of sidings was laid down, and warehouses and stores sprang up round it. Miles of paved roads traversed the desert. The engineers, helped by battalions of native artificers and labourers, worked against time, and the Egyptian workman, for intensive effort when it is made worth his while, has few equals. All this, however, was no more than the beginning. The project was set on foot of carrying across the whole breadth of the Sinai peninsula a double-track standard gauge railway. And the project was carried out. Later on, in the movement of supplies the value of this double line was beyond estimation.

Conquest of the water problem was if anything a yet more outstanding feat. The water was drawn from the Nile, brought across country, carried under the Suez Canal on the syphon principle, filtered, and yielded a pure supply of half-a-million gallons daily. How was the supply to be prolonged to Rafa across 140 and more miles of thirsty wilderness? By pumping. Every twenty-four miles or so along the line of pipes, steel lengths screwed one into another, there was built an elevated reservoir into which the water on receipt was lifted by the pumps, giving it a head of pressure sufficient to drive it through the next section. Of course, to keep up the rate of the flow, the diameter of the pipe line on each successive section had to be reduced, and that of necessity lowered the quantity deliverable from the half-a-million gallons a day at Kantara to some 160,000 gallons a day at Rafa and beyond. To make up the difference as far as possible wells *en route* were developed. The route along the northern coast of Sinai has always been the one practicable road precisely because water is there to be found by boring in the sand dunes. It is bad water—so salt that it cannot be used for locomotives, but in the desert even water of that quality is precious. From such sources another 100,000 gallons a day deliverable at the front was obtained. Then there were the wells at the front. By themselves they were inadequate. Supplemented, however, they met the needs.

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Taken as a whole, those needs were large. An army, of course, is not made up of its combatants only. Labour at the rear absorbs a great multitude, and at its maximum the Expeditionary Force represented a ration strength of nearly 470,000 men, plus 160,000 animals. Science alone could enable such a host to be moved across the thirsty wastes of Sinai. Yet unless they were moved, to drive the Turk out of Palestine was impossible.

Railway and pipe line were laid down together, the one aiding the other. Along the sections under construction water was sent in water trains. As each section was finished it became a fresh starting point. It affords some idea of the traffic to state that some 2,000 tons of consumable supplies had to be forwarded daily, that the sending on of equipment, munitions, clothing, tentage, implements, saddlery, cooking outfits, and the rest kept 3,000 men at Kantara constantly busy, and that besides the railway the transport included nearly 4,000 motor vehicles.

The preparations, too, involved moving across Sinai additional batteries of heavy and siege guns; laying branch military railways from Rafa to Karm-el-Abadi, ten miles inland, and from Deir-el-Belah, a small coast town half-way between Rafa and Gaza, across country to the Wadi Ghuzze, and forming depots of supplies and munitions at railheads.

Not the least important feature, however, was the reinforcement of the Air Service. Up to this time that part of the force had consisted of two squadrons; one of the Royal Air Service which "spotted" for the gunners, the other of Australian flying men who did long distance reconnaissances, photoing, and bombing. Another squadron of the Royal Air Force was added, and the addition was of consequence, for with the swifter and later machines sent out at the same time, the airmen speedily won a complete ascendancy. During the earlier stages of the ensuing operations alone they brought down nearly one hundred enemy planes. Besides that they took, in addition to telephoto panoramas, thousands of photographs both of the hostile



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defences and of the country far behind the Turkish lines. There was not a detail of the Turkish works which remained unknown. On the other hand, hostile aircraft being kept off, the British movements largely continued secret or had to be conjectured. On events this had a notable influence.

As a whole the British Expeditionary Force was increased to seven divisions of infantry and four divisions of mounted troops, in each division three brigades. The infantry formations were the 10th (Irish) Division (Major-General W. B. Emery, R.A.), the 52nd (Lowland) Division of Gallipoli fame (Major-General J. Hill), the 53rd (Welsh) Division (Major-General S. F. Mott), the 54th (East Anglian) Division (Major-General S. W. Hare), the 60th (London) Division (Major-General Sir J. S. M. Shea), the 74th (Yeomanry) Division (Major-General E. S. Girdwood), and the 75th Division, made up of Scottish, Indian and some South Country troops (Major-General P. C. Palin). The horsed troops were the 4th Cavalry Division (Major-General Sir G. de S. Barrow), the 5th Cavalry Division (Major-General H. J. Macandrew), the Australian Mounted Division (Major-General H. W. Hodson), and the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division (Major-General Sir E. W. C. Chaytor).

The infantry were grouped into two Army Corps, the XXth under the command of Lieut.-General Sir Philip Chetwode; and the XXIst under the command of Lieut.-General Sir E. S. Bulfin. The cavalry formed a Desert Mounted Corps, in command of Lieut.-General Sir H. G. Chauvel.

On the enemy's side there were counter-preparations, and they were on a scale by no means minor. British activities had not escaped the eye of the German staff in Syria. Indeed, as early as August the German staff in Syria had convinced themselves that another attempt to break through the front in Palestine was in the wind. They sent on this information to Constantinople, and they expressed, it has since been ascertained, the opinion either that there should forthwith be drafted to Palestine reinforcements which would enable them at all costs to



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hold Beersheba, which they urged was the danger point, or that the defences at Beersheba should be given up, and the Turkish forces concentrated round Gaza. Indubitably this was sound advice. If the Turks, holding on to Gaza, barred access to the coastal plain, and could not be shifted, a British advance upon Jerusalem would be checked. To say nothing of the difficulties of the road from Beersheba to Jerusalem by way of Hebron, difficulties making the movement of artillery and wheeled transport next to impossible, no British movement of that kind could, with a foe at Gaza ready to strike at its flank, be so much as contemplated.

Such was the military aspect of the matter. At Constantinople, however, the purely military aspect was in part obscured by other and as it there appeared more urgent considerations. For the Pan-Islamic party, which with German support was predominant, and of which Enver Pasha was leader, the loss of Bagdad had meant a grave decline in prestige. Their professed policy stood for the triumph of Islam. Their policy had resulted in the extinction of Turkish rule both at Bagdad and at Mecca. What then could they do save avow their determination to recover both places? Publication of that resolve had been endorsed from Berlin, and to prove that Berlin was in earnest Marshal von Falkenhayn had arrived with some German battalions, plus engineers and field service and other details. His mission was first to get together and next to command the Column which was to drive the British out of Irak. So affairs stood when the news arrived of these British activities in Sinai. All the same, Enver Pasha was loth to give the Bagdad plan up. He said so. In reply, the German staff in Syria did not neglect to point out that if, failing sufficient Turkish reinforcements, the British broke through in Palestine and swept north to Aleppo, as they very probably might, then von Falkenhayn and his troops in Mesopotamia would find themselves entrapped. For some weeks apparently this discussion went on, but in October the staff in Syria carried their point, and

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Falkenhayn, recalled from Mosul, was ordered to divert his troops to Palestine.

Three Turkish divisions, the 19th, 24th and 26th, hurried to Palestine, and arrived in the latter part of October. Another, the 20th, was on the way, and more were to follow. While, however, it was easy thus to alter plans, it was, with the length and character of the Turkish communications, by no means easy to carry out the alteration. The time lost had now to be made good by extra energy. Reinforced, the enemy set about the stiffening of his defences. Round Gaza these became a perfect maze of trenches, entanglements and obstacles, the backbone of the system strongly fortified positions designed mutually to support each other and laying every access under a cross fire. Round Beersheba also the defences were strengthened; further munition depots formed along the coast to the north of Gaza; and a new line of military railway laid down from that place. It appears to have been the opinion of the German staff, the Yilderim Group as it was called, that with these precautions the Gaza position had been made impregnable. The front as a whole was judged to be so strong that no second line of positions was called for.

## CHAPTER V

### THE VICTORIES OF BEERSHEBA AND GAZA

General Allenby's turning movement—The counter-projects of von Falkenhayn—British bombardment of Gaza defences—German Staff outwitted—The Beersheba defences—The British assault—Its complete success—Daring charge of Australian Light Horse—Enemy panic and failure to destroy the wells—Dash of the turning movement—British attack at Gaza—Rapid advance from Beersheba—Operations at Tel Kuweilfe—Breach of the hostile fortified front—Advance to Sheria—Enemy evacuation of Gaza—State of the town—Skill and boldness of the British movements.

OCTOBER 31 had been decided upon by General Allenby as the date of the Beersheba attack. El Khalasa, and Bir Asluj, two points about ten miles south of Beersheba and on the edge of the Sinai uplands, were to be the starting places of the mounted troops. It was part of the plan that the mounted men were to make a detour round Beersheba to the east and north-east and push in upon the town from the hills.

There were two reasons which led the enemy to put aside the conclusion that Beersheba would be the point of the main British onset. One was the strength of the Gaza position; the other the water problem. Both at El Khalasa and at Bir Asluj there are wells, but the Germans had taken care to blow them in, and apart from these water resources no move upon Beersheba that way could be essayed. The Germans, however, had not reckoned among other things with the Australians, nor with British determination. The Desert Mounted Corps between October 26 and October 30, working night and day in relays rapidly relieving one another,

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not only cleared the two wells at El Khalasa, but installed pumping machinery, increasing the yield to 4,500 gallons per hour, enough for a mounted division and their horses. At Bir Asluj the destruction had been yet more thorough. Restoration there and the putting of pumps into position involved heavy work. It too, however, was finished within four days, and there also water enough was found for a mounted division.

The situation had now become one of remarkable interest. Not only were the Germans and Turks busy with their counter-preparations; they were, so far as their means of observation and the present inferiority of their air service allowed, keenly watching the British moves, and as keenly speculating on their meaning. Intentions, at any rate on the enemy side, were large. Just at this time the Yilderim Group were working out a plan for re-forming the Turkish forces in Palestine into two armies—the VIIth and VIIIth, and Fevzi Pasha had been nominated as commander of the one and General von Krassenstein as commander of the other. The command-in-chief was assigned to Falkenhayn, and assuming the impending British attack to be beaten, he had a project of immediate counter-attack. He proposed to cast the weight of his force against the British left, that is on the coastal sector, and, pushing the British off their main line of communication, to force them south into the waterless area of Sinai, where, of course, their destruction would be assured. An ambitious scheme, and theoretically sound, but resting, it will be noted, on presumptions; the first that a main assault could not be delivered against Beersheba; the second that a main attack against Gaza—the only apparent alternative—must in the circumstances fail.

At the same time, von Falkenhayn was not disposed, if he could help it, to wait for any British attack. His preference was to strike before the British preparations were finished. That, he thought, afforded an even better chance. To seize the better chance, however, there must be a massing on the Palestine front of most of the

## THE VICTORIES OF BEERSHEBA AND GAZA

total Turkish strength in the field. For this purpose the position in Mesopotamia had to be risked. That, however, was the chief risk, for the Russians were no longer to be feared in the Caucasus. Besides, a resounding victory in Sinai would restore lost prestige, and later on ensure a turn of the tide in Mesopotamia.

On the other hand, suppose the massing could not be carried out in less than two months. What then? The scheme was mist.

✓ On October 27 the land bombardment of the south-western defences of Gaza by the British was opened. Part was taken in by some 300 guns, including all the heavies. Behind Gaza the enemy was holding his reserves, the 7th and 19th divisions of infantry, and desiring apparently to ascertain what exactly this artillery outburst portended, he on the same day threw forward reconnaissance raids of the British line inland. He dispatched a mobile column, two regiments of cavalry, and three battalions of infantry with guns, towards Karm. Covering Karm and El Girheir, where the laying of the light railway was still in progress, was a string of British posts, held by the Middlesex Yeomanry. One of the line of posts, situated on a knoll, was taken, and the detachment holding it destroyed; the detachment held out until only three men were left unwounded. Another post, at Point 630, though entirely surrounded, held out all day, beating off attack after attack. This enabled the 53rd (Welsh) Division to be moved up. On their appearance the enemy retired.

For the next two days the bombardment of the Gaza works by the land batteries continued, and it was no mere haphazard pounding. To the resources of aerial photography and cinematograph reproduction had been added those of sound-ranging. The sensitive electrical instruments which measure with exactitude both the volume of explosions and the point and distance of their origin must be classed among the wonders of modern war. Checked by aerial observation, the position, movement, and calibre of hostile batteries could thus be ascertained. That information having been gleaned, on



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the fourth day of the bombardment (October 30) the warships joined in.

Did the enemy as yet suspect, notwithstanding this gunfire on his right, that the real assault was to take place on the left of his line? Seemingly from his actions he did not. And from documents which later on fell into the British hands the inference was shown to be correct. Major von Papen, notorious for his conduct as German Military Attaché at Washington, was now serving on the German staff in Palestine as a liaison officer. He kept the Yilderim Headquarters informed of the results of observations, and his telegraphic summary, dated October 24, told them that indications were those of an outflanking attack on Beersheba with about one infantry and one cavalry division, but "main attack, as before, must be expected on the Gaza front."<sup>1</sup>

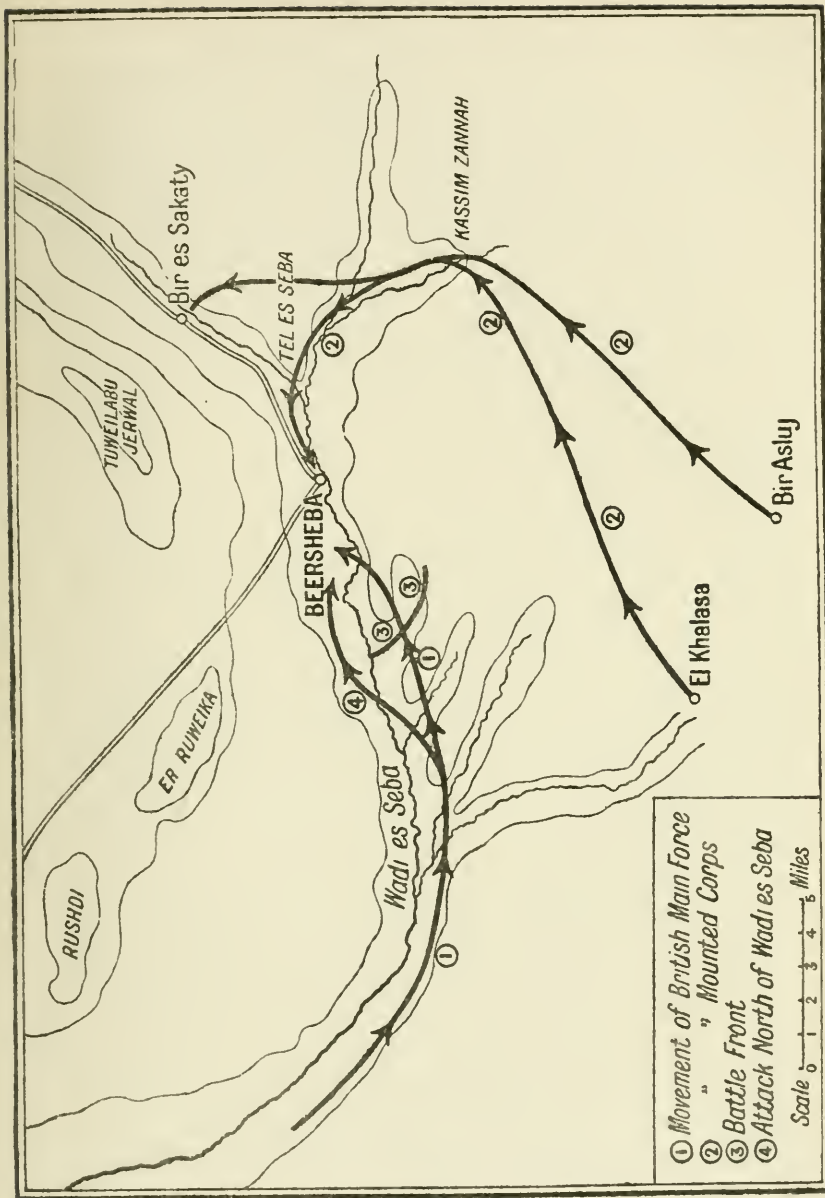
It is evident then that the bombardment fully fulfilled its purpose. The kernel of the British commander's plan, a thrust at Gaza from inland and north-east, was never so much as dreamed of.

During October 30 the concentration for the attack upon Beersheba received its finishing touches. The concentration was carried through well up to time.

On the part of the mounted men there was to be a night ride from the jumping-off places to the south.

Besides the Mounted Column detailed to execute the turning movement through the hills to the east, there were told off for the main assault the 60th and 74th Divisions, a brigade of the 53rd Division, the Imperial Camel Corps, and a regiment of Yeomanry. Their movements also took place by night. The standing camps which the troops had occupied at Deir el Belah on the coast were left intact. This ruse was intended to, and it was afterwards found did, lead the enemy to suppose that the British dispositions remained as before—six infantry divisions echeloned in depth on the coastal

<sup>1</sup> *Official Record of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*



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sector, the seventh (the 53rd) covering the British right inland.

Owing to hitches on the Turkish lines of communication the projected anticipation of the British attack had fallen through, and looking at the intentions entertained at the Yilderim Headquarters, and the importance attached to defeating a British onset against Gaza in the first instance, it is not surprising that on the enemy side few changes were made. Beersheba was held by the Turkish 29th Division, part of the 3rd Army Corps, commanded by Ismet Bey. The 29th Division were Arabs. They were not entirely to be depended upon, and on that account, in part as a precaution, battalions from the 16th and 24th Divisions had also been drafted into the town.

Beersheba lies in a recess in the hills on the north side of the Wadi es Seba, a confluent of the Ghuzze. On the south side of the valley rises the Abu Shaar ridge, nearly 1,000 feet high. The ridge had been strongly fortified. It was the intention to assault and carry it from the western end.

To reach Beersheba from the south or south-west it is necessary to cross a succession of smaller wadis. The night march was, notwithstanding, carried through without a hitch. On the right of the force were the cavalry; on the left the camelry supported by a brigade of the 53rd. These troops on the left were to demonstrate against the defences north of the Wadi es Seba.

By daybreak the advanced defences had been reached, and after a brief bombardment they were assaulted by London troops, the 181st Brigade, and carried. This enabled the field guns to be brought within range of the hostile main line. Directed against the western face of the works, the renewed artillery preparation covered a front of two and a half miles. One hundred guns and howitzers took part in it, backed by twenty heavies which ranged on the Turkish batteries. The works had been so strongly wired in that the cutting of the wire with shrapnel occupied most of the forenoon. But just

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after midday the attack, carried out by four brigades (the 179th, 181st, 230th and 231st), was thrown forward.<sup>1</sup>

In less than an hour the Abu Shaar ridge—it formed the key of the defences—had been won. Though exposed during this advance to a very accurate artillery fire, the troops showed unshakeable steadiness ; once in the enemy positions they cleared them with an irresistible sweep. The losses were light.

It was now possible to assault from the south and end on the works covering Beersheba on the west, and that was at once done. While north of the Wadi es Seba the 181st Brigade feinted a frontal attack, the 230th Brigade assaulted from the south, taking the defences in flank. This occupied the afternoon. The back of the resistance had been broken. It was patchy.

The attack on Beersheba had in fact proved a surprise, and the surprise was completed when coincidently with the final clearance of the western defences the 4th Australian Light Horse, the leading corps of the Mounted Column, dashing undeterred by rifle and machine-gun fire over successive lines of trenches, rode into the town from the east. The daring of this feat threw the Turks and Germans into a panic. There was a wild rush to clear out. So hasty, in fact, was the flight that though the Germans had made careful and minute arrangements for blowing in the whole of the seventeen wells to which Beersheba owes its fame, and though all the charges and bombs were in position, there was not time to blow

<sup>1</sup> The order of battle from right (south) to left (north) was :—

### 60TH DIVISION :

179th Brigade (Brigadier-General FitzEdwards)—2/13th, 2/14th, 2/15th and 2/16th Battalions London Regiment.

181st Brigade (Brigadier-General A. C. da Costa)—2/21st, 2/22nd, 2/23rd, and 2/24th Battalions London Regiment.

### 74TH DIVISION :

231st Brigade (Brigadier-General Heathcote)—10th Shropshires, 24th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 25th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 24th Battalion Royal Welsh Regiment.

230th Brigade (Brigadier-General McNeill)—10th East Kents, 16th Royal Sussex Regiment, 15th Suffolks, 12th Norfolks.

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in more than three. Two reservoirs were left still full of water, and some of the chief wells still equipped with their *saggias* or bucket-wheels. To the British force this advantage was priceless. It was one of those incidents, seemingly trivial, which in truth determine the fortunes of campaigns, for had a halt of some days been necessary in order to restore the wells, the enemy might have readjusted his dispositions. In the circumstances, he was given no such opportunity.

Despite the haste to get away, and the Germans had been among the first to decamp, 2,000 of the Turks were taken prisoners. And the losses otherwise were so heavy—in addition to the wounded, some 500 Turkish dead were found and buried on the battlefield—that, as General Allenby has recorded, the enemy force holding Beersheba was put completely out of action.

It was, of course, the turning movement by the mounted men which had given the finishing stroke to the victory. The rendezvous appointed for the columns from El Khalasa and Bir Asluj was Kasim Zanna, a place in the hills, five miles east of Beersheba. To arrive there one part of the Mounted Column had ridden in the night 35 and the other part 25 miles. After having sent a detachment north along the Hebron road to secure Bir es Sakaty and prevent a counter-surprise from that direction, the main body, debouching from the hills, found themselves in a stretch of flat country, which to reach Beersheba they had to cross. Near Beersheba, at the junction of two valleys, and overlooking the flat expanse, is an isolated hill, called the Tel-es-Seba. It was held by the enemy in strength, and the defence showed determination. By the afternoon, however, the Mounted Column had seized the position. The way was then open for the last dash.

While no time was to be lost in developing the success at Beersheba, it formed part of that development that the enemy should be held at Gaza. The defences there fronting towards the coast extended across the sand dunes in several lines of redoubts linked up by trenches. The dunes are high, more like hills than hummocks, and



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the sand loose and deep. It had been a considerable labour to establish the fortifications. In the bombardment from sea and land they had been badly knocked about, and the losses of the Turks holding them were heavy. One division of enemy troops, it was afterwards ascertained, had had to be withdrawn and replaced.

The infantry attack had been fixed for November 2, and that date had been decided upon because it was intended to launch the renewed assault against the left of the Turkish line on November 3. To draw as many as possible of the immediately available Turkish reserves into Gaza, and to prevent enemy forces from being moved from that point towards Beersheba, was the substantial object.

Having, before the hostile lines at Gaza could be reached, a distance to go of from one to nearly two miles over heavy sandy ground with stiff declivities, the troops set out early, and while it was yet dark. The front of the attack, some 6,000 yards in breadth, extended from Sheik Hazan on the coast transversely across the dunes south-east to Umbrella Hill. This last position formed a kind of bastion jutting out from the hostile main line and therefore enfilading any attack. Assault upon it was made a preliminary, and it had, shortly before midnight, been stormed and taken by part of the 52nd (Lowland) Division. That procedure simplified the larger operation.

Timed for three in the morning the latter proved entirely successful. To the assault of the 156th Brigade (Leggett) on the right, fell Umbrella Hill; the 1/4th and 1/5th Norfolks stormed the El Arish redoubt; and the 1/5th and 1/6th Essex Rafa redoubt, and the Beach and Sea posts. In the centre the 161st Brigade (Marriot Doddington) rushed the Zoward and Cricket redoubts, while on the left the 163rd Brigade (Mudge) broke into and cleared the Belah trench system, and carried Turtle Hill. The assault was then pressed on to the hostile second line, and the 1/5th Bedfords and 1/11th Londons wrested from the Turks Sheik Hazan and Gun

## BRITISH CAMPAIGNS IN THE NEARER EAST

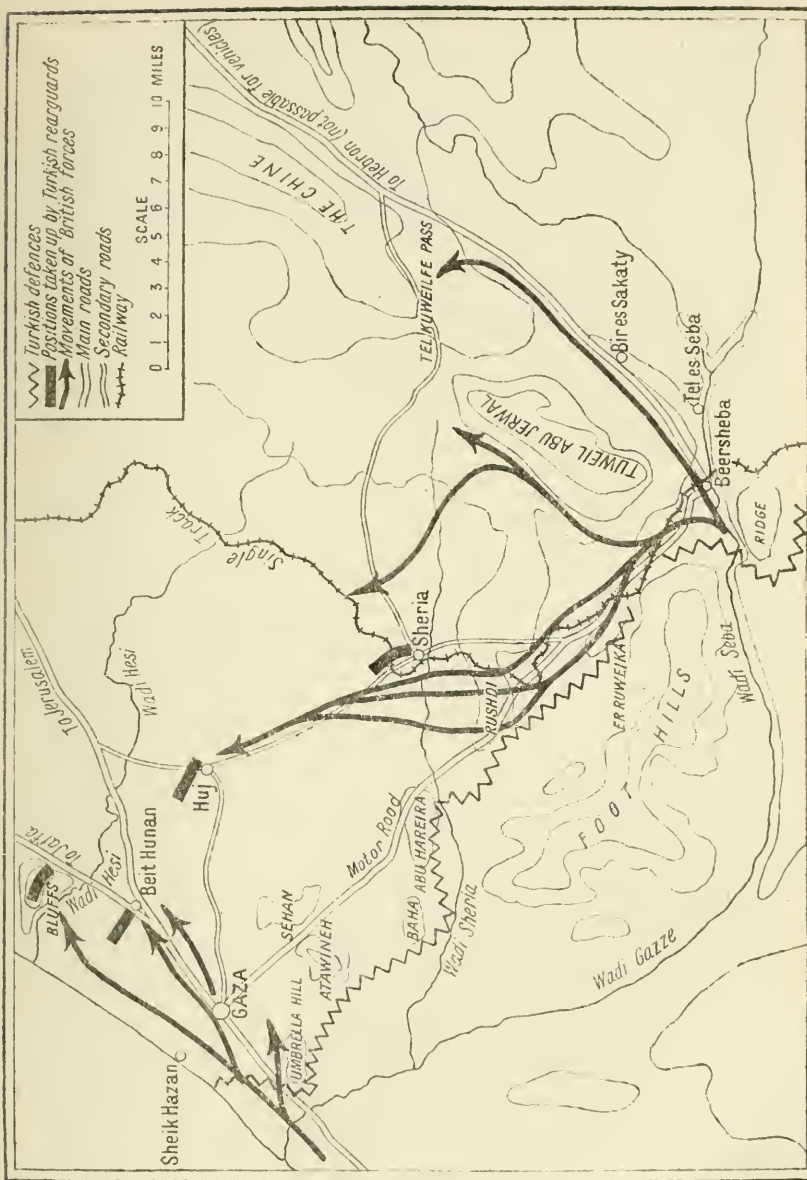
Hill, its two chief points of support. The defences over the whole front attacked had been taken. Only some last line positions still held out in the centre.

With the object of retaking Sheik Hazan, the enemy launched two counter-attacks. The first was broken up by the fire of the warships and that of the heavy guns ashore ; the second, as well as a simultaneous assault in support of it in the centre of the line, was repulsed by the infantry. The severity of the Turkish losses was revealed by the numbers of the dead. More than a thousand were found in the captured trenches, and nearly 700 prisoners were taken. There was a great haul, too, of rifles, ammunition and stores. All this meant that if the enemy was now to keep the British out of Gaza, he must reinforce there and without delay.

Operations at the Beersheba end of the line had not meanwhile been suspended. Though some further preparations had to be carried out, and the water question dealt with, a move had been made on November 1. A Mountain Column was sent north-east to secure El-Dhaheriyeh, half way on the road to Hebron, and a junction of secondary routes of some importance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To assist in completing the rout of the Turkish troops retiring from Beersheba, a small mobile force on camels, consisting of Lewis gunners, machine-gunners, and a few Sudanese Arab scouts, under Lieut.-Col. S. F. Newcombe, R.E., D.S.O., left Asluj on October 30. It had a number of machine-guns and Lewis guns, a large quantity of small arms ammunition, and carried three days' rations. Moving rapidly, it established its headquarters at Yutta, and on October 31 occupied some high ground west of and commanding the road between Dhaheriyeh and Hebron. It was hoped that the Turks retiring by night from Beersheba would encounter this force, which, taking them by surprise, would by its large fire power put them to rout, and cause a general debacle on the Turkish left wing. However, as the Anzac Mounted Division had cut the road further south, the Turkish forces from Beersheba retired north to Tel esh Sheria. The force, nevertheless, succeeded in intercepting and capturing the motor transport with supplies which was endeavouring to reach Beersheba from Jerusalem.

The Turks were surprised by the appearance of this force, and having no idea of its numbers, despatched the 12th Depot Regiment from Hebron, and the 143rd Regiment from Tel esh Sheria—six battalions in all—to dislodge it. It held out resolutely, but, after sustaining heavy casualties and having exhausted all its ammunition, was obliged to surrender on November 2 or 3.—*Official Records of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*



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At the same time, the 53rd Division and the Camel Corps pushed from Beersheba due north into the hills. The purpose of this move was, as it were, to keep open the door for the impending flanking pressure. Just north of Beersheba begins the backbone of the Palestine ridge. The chine runs nearly south to north. The southern apex, Tuweil Abu Jerwal, 1,505 feet in height, had become a tactical position of, in the circumstances, no slight consequence. In the enemy's hands this summit and the chine might prove, if not an impregnable, at any rate a formidable barrier. To seize it forthwith before it could be occupied by him was essential. The surprise at Beersheba, followed by the rapidity of this next move, enabled the seizure to be made.

There is at Tel Kuweilfe, some miles farther to the north, a break in the chine forming a pass from east to west. Mounted troops had been pushed forward to secure the position. But the enemy, now on the alert, was already there in force. Indeed he essayed to turn the tables, and pass to the offensive. Bringing up all his available reserves, he made, during November 4 and 5, several attempts to dislodge the mounted troops who, though they could not get through it, had barred the eastern outlet of the pass. These attacks did not succeed.

Notwithstanding the pressure at Gaza the Turkish reserves which had been thrown into this fighting were parts of the 19th, 27th, and 16th Divisions.

It was the opinion of General Allenby that hostile concentration at Tel Kuweilfe and to the north of that point was intended to confuse and delay his plan of operations. Possibly enough it was, but whatever the enemy's motive the British commander decided to make no change in his procedure. Having secured the Tuweil Abu Jerwal part of the chine, his intention was to assault forthwith and in flank the Ruweika group of defences lying just to the west of it along a lower rise, running south-east to north-west, and commanding the motor route. He intended to attack towards Tel Kuweilfe at the same time.

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Both attacks succeeded. That at Ruweika opened by the 74th Division, who with great dash assaulted the outlying works on the east of the system, was developed by the 60th Division and the 10th Division, who, taking the rest of the defences in enfilade, speedily cleared them. So rapid indeed was the progress of the attack that the next group farther to the west, the Rushdi system, was also captured.

From Ruweika across country to Sheria, the position covering Gaza from the east, was not more than five miles. While the operations at Rushdi were going on, the yeomanry struck towards Sheria, and reached the valley at that place. The infantry followed as soon as possible. By nightfall Sheria railway station was in their hands.

There was here a large hostile dump. Before retreating the enemy had made arrangements for exploding it by means of time fuses. Going off in quick succession one after another, the stacks of shells started a huge fire which lit up the country for miles around. This illumination, needless to say, locally disclosed British movements, and with the help of the blaze the Turkish rearguards were able so long as darkness lasted to hold the farther side of the Wadi Sheria. They were themselves in darkness, while in any assault upon their positions the attacking troops would have been silhouetted against the glare. By this ruse they gained a delay of some hours.

Delay had become imperative. The defences wrested from the enemy on this day had covered altogether a front of seven miles. Some 600 Turks had been taken prisoners and guns and machine-guns captured.

The attack, too, had turned the Kuweilfe position. To the 53rd Division, told off for the operations there, the enemy offered a stubborn opposition. The Welshmen stormed a hill commanding the pass, lost it in a counter-attack, retook it, and another hill behind it at the same time, and made good their footing. They had kept a good part of the enemy's reserves here engaged just as another part of his force was held at Gaza.



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In between at Sheria, the point that mattered, he was left weak. While the way was open General Allenby made the most of the chance by striking in and cutting the Turkish army into two parts. His mounted troops, kept in readiness for the purpose, were launched in pursuit towards Huj and Jemmamah to the north-west, closing the roads from Gaza to Jerusalem. Divided from the force at and to the north of Kuweilfe, nothing was now left for the Turks still holding Gaza and the defensive groups at Atawineh and Baha save to retire along the coast, while the remainder of the Turkish force was driven inland to the north-east.

The Turks in Gaza and in these more westerly defences had, however, already realised that it was time to be gone. A second British "holding" attack on the remaining Gaza defences had been fixed for the night of November 6-7, for since November 3 the bombardment had been kept up. The opposition proved to be slight, and in fact no more than a blind to screen evacuation. That had taken place during the night. The assault fixed for dawn found most of the works deserted.

Gaza, when the British entered it, was solitary. The civil population had been removed *en masse*, and everything in the shape of door and window frames, flooring and stairways had been wrenched from the houses in order to shore up the enemy trenches among the sand-hills. Further, to elude aircraft observation, munitions had been stored in the larger buildings. Where those had been struck by shells from the Naval Squadron, the explosion of their contents had blown them to pieces. Gaza was a mass of ruins.

Meanwhile the operations against the remains of the hostile front to the east of Gaza were being pressed. At daybreak on November 7 the Hareira group of works was taken, and Sheria at the same time.

Thus in the course of one week was swept away what had appeared to be one of the most formidable and extensive mazes of fortifications ever elaborated, and judged by the enemy to be impregnable. The feat was

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a signal example of military skill and audacity, for the attacking force was numerically the smaller of the two. But the weak spot had been discovered, and the enemy given no time to recover. Laid out after many months of labour and at enormous cost, these miles of fortified front had literally been crumpled up.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TAKING OF JERUSALEM

Military aims of the British pursuit—Struggle of the Turks to escape capture—Combat at Wadi Hesi—Gallantry of the Lowland Division—Combats at Huj—Notable work of Irish troops—Convergence of the British thrusts—Intrepid charge of Yeomanry—Transport and water difficulties—Attempted enemy reaction—Battle of El Kubab—Capture of Jaffa—Movement from the coast upon Jerusalem—Fighting in the passes—A battle in a fog—Seizure of the Nebi Samwal ridge—Rapidly and effect of the British moves—Plan of operations round Jerusalem—Gallantry of the 60th and 74th Divisions—Defences west of the city taken—March of the Welsh Division from Hebron—Turkish measures against the Jews—Enemy panic—Last acts of the Turks in Jerusalem—Evacuation scenes—The surrender—Mob loots the Turkish barracks—General Allenby's entry—A curious prophecy—Popular rejoicings—Military effects of the fall of Jerusalem.

ANOTHER phase of the operations was now entered upon—that of the pursuit.

For the time being it was certain that, since both the railway and the road routes between Gaza and Jerusalem had been cut, the divided fragments of the enemy forces could not reunite save well to the north. On the British side, to emphasise this striking military advantage had become the primary aim.

The nearest point at which possibly north of Gaza the enemy might attempt a stand was the Wadi Hesi, where another western spur of the main ridge came close to the coast, broken here by the inlet of the river. To this position the enemy had always attached a capital importance. In present circumstances it was of the utmost moment to him. Looked at broadly, the situation was this. One arm of the British pursuit was being

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pressed across country through Sheria towards the north-west; another was being pushed coastwise to the north. Between the two arms, thus converging, was a large body of Turkish troops, the 26th Division, commanded by Fakr ed Din Bey, and the 54th Division, commanded by Nashui Bey. The problem was to get them out, and on either side it was at the utmost a question of hours. Not the least notable feature of the matter is that the retreating were more numerous than the pursuing troops. It was not by weight of numbers that General Allenby had so far won; it was by skill in strategy, and by the able tactics of his lieutenants. Staggered the enemy had been, but he was by no means so weak as not to put up a stiff fight when cornered. And in the circumstances, seeing that so much was at stake, he did at both the points of pressure fight his hardest.

On the British side, the 52nd Division was pushed on to the Wadi Hesi forthwith. And here, though it was, relatively speaking, a minor affair, there was fought one of the most remarkable actions of the Great War. The 52nd Division found the spur beyond the River Hesi held by a strong Turkish rearguard. Undaunted by the hostile fire, the sturdy Lowlanders crossed the river and carried the height. Then the enemy rallied and the Scotsmen were pushed off the bluff on to its southern slope. Rallying there in turn they attacked a second time. Once more the Turks, beaten in the hand-to-hand encounter were driven off. More enemy forces were now, however, brought up, and another Turkish counter attack, though at a heavy cost, won the hill. But the Lowlanders, at their old rallying point freshly supplied with ammunition, came on a third time and cast the foe out. It was still not enough. With yet a further infusion of strength, the Turks attacked again and cleared the top of the bluff once more. Their triumph was transitory. Before they could establish themselves the Scots, rebounding, were into them with the bayonet, and they ran. Because it was called for in order to save the Turkish army from irreparable wreck, there was a

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fourth counter-attack, and for the fourth time the position changed hands. But was this final? Not at all. The fifth appearance of the Lowlanders, coming on with a wild battle shout, was a climax which not even Turkish fanaticism or German fury could withstand. The Turkish *moral* gave way. The Lowlanders had been ordered to take this position, and they took it.

And this experience was paralleled by that of the 10th Division. In advancing towards Huj at the other point of the convergence, the Irishmen fought and defeated in succession three bodies of the hostile rearguard in a distance of ten miles, and within as many hours. These were the episodes which demoralised the Turkish army.

The victory of the 52nd Division had opened up the Jaffa road, and mounted troops were pushed north along it. There were now two points at which chiefly enemy rearguards were posted with orders to hold each to the last. One was at Beit Hanun, the junction north of Gaza of the Jaffa route with that from Jerusalem; the other was Huj.

Through Huj lay the line of retreat of those enemy forces who had been holding the Atawineh and Baha groups of defences. Gaza lost on the one side and the Ruweika and Rushdi defences on the other, they were left no choice but to hasten out. Evacuating their positions on the night of November 7, and moving by cross routes upon Huj, they had there posted their rearguard. The distance between Huj and Beit Hanun is not more than ten miles, and it was through that narrow gap that the retreating Turks had to make good their escape. It will be seen, therefore, how much depended upon these combats. The fighting at both points was stubborn. At Beit Hanun a whole day was taken up before the rearguard was broken. At Huj the resistance was overcome by an intrepid charge of the Worcester and Warwick Yeomanry, who rounded up twelve of the enemy's guns. But the time taken up had been enough to allow the main body of the Turks to slip through. It was in that manner that the remains of the



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26th and 54th Divisions got out. A mass of munitions and stores and much of their artillery, however, had to be abandoned.

From Huj the British pursuit was pressed towards El Meidel, Julis and Beit Duras ; it swerved, that is to say, laterally towards the coast so as to take the Turks retreating north in flank. On the other wing, in the meantime, the enemy had fallen back from Tel Kuweilfe by cross routes towards Hebron. The difficulties in the way of the British movements were now less the strength of the opposition encountered than the problems of supplies and of water. Already the British troops were most of them a good many miles from railhead, and in a country little favourable for transport. Water there was and enough, but it had to be drawn up from wells, and even where the means for drawing it had not been destroyed, as was frequently the case, rapid distribution was not easy. To neglect these problems would in the end have meant loss of time, and it was important, if the enemy was not to rally, that time should be saved.

Even on November 9 evidences were not lacking of a reaction. The larger part of the broken Turkish army was that retiring north. To relieve the pressure upon it the enemy was hurrying what reinforcements he could raise towards Hebron, and he made a counter-demonstration from that place. But General Allenby advisedly treated this apparent threat for what it was worth. He was aware that in the fighting round Tel Kuweilfe this smaller part of the Turkish army had suffered severely. He knew it to be short alike of supplies and of ammunition, and its hasty retirement over indifferent roads and through difficult country had contributed further to its disorganisation. Effective counter-attack from that quarter was therefore not immediately to be looked for. He contented himself accordingly on that side and for the present with blocking the outlets, and pressed the main pursuit.

The effort of the enemy was now to form a new line extending from Hebron north-west through Beit Jibrin

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on the main road from Gaza to Jerusalem, and by that means to link up with the coastal force. As they moved forward the British found lines of freshly dug, but unfinished trenches.

This opposition rapidly stiffened. Indeed it soon became apparent that the enemy had determined to make a stand. British movements were slower than hitherto not merely because of the supplies problem, but because of the temperature. There had set in from the southern deserts a hot wind which rendered marches fatiguing.

At once to flank the British movement along the coast, and to cover the routes inland to Jerusalem, the enemy had from Beit Jibrin northwards taken up a position along the western edge of the highlands as far as El Kubab on the Jaffa-Jerusalem road. It was a strong position, for it barred the defiles.

But as a menace it failed. The British mounted troops moving along the coastal plain continued to press north. Already on November 11 they had reached Nahr Sukeir at the outlet of the Mema river, thirty miles north of Gaza, and secured a bridgehead on the farther side, the Murreh hill.

It was the intention of General Allenby to attack the right of the hostile front near the Jaffa-Jerusalem road ; a bold decision, but one best calculated to embarrass and puzzle the enemy. If he moved the weight of his force to resist assault there, the Turkish General risked a rupture of his centre, and he had already experienced the peril of that manœuvre. It was not probable, therefore, that he would run the risk a second time.

The attack, entrusted to the 52nd Division, supported on their right by the mounted troops, took place on November 13. Both infantry and cavalry had to advance across a rolling plain. Walled, flat-roofed villages surrounded by plantations afforded points of support for the defence. But the advance of the Lowlanders was intrepid, and the cavalry rode forward with conspicuous dash. The enemy's positions were reached and cleared, two of the villages he held, Katrah

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and El Mughar, wrested from him, and his front broken. The horse pushed in, took 1,100 prisoners, 3 guns, and numerous machine-guns.

This success enabled the British, while the pursuit to the north went on, to push the remainder of the Turks east and frustrated their attempted conjunction. So far the effort to arrest the pursuit had broken down. The Turkish losses alike in artillery, munitions and other equipment and stores had been heavy. The 9,000 prisoners taken up to this time, and the enemy's casualties, though severe, might conceivably and possibly be made up. The disorganisation of equipment would take time, and much time, to repair. For the same reason as in Mesopotamia, even though it might not be to the same extent, the Turkish campaign in southern Syria had been seriously crippled.

One result of the victory of November 13 followed at once. On November 14 the British troops reached and captured, together with a haul of rolling stock, the railway junction where the line from Gaza joined that from Jaffa. This was a vital link in the enemy's communications.

The pursuit north was pressed as well as the advance east. The cavalry reached Ramleh and Ludd, the former on the main road, the latter on the railway to Jaffa, and occupied both towns by the evening of November 15. By this move Jaffa had become undefendable. The port was occupied on November 16 without opposition.

This capture was important. In possession of Jaffa, the British Expeditionary Force had a new and excellently situated base for oversea supplies. The main handicap of the campaign had been overcome.<sup>1</sup>

No feature of the operations up to this time had been more remarkable than their rapidity. A fortnight only had elapsed since the attack upon Beersheba, but in that fortnight, besides the destruction of the enemy's fortified front, there had taken place, reckoning from

<sup>1</sup> The transport of supplies by rail across Sinai was reduced from 2,000 tons to less than 900 tons a day.

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the British lines before Gaza to Jaffa, an advance covering 75 miles of country. Farther inland the advance had covered forty miles, and that in spite of the trying conditions of the climate and some stiff fighting.

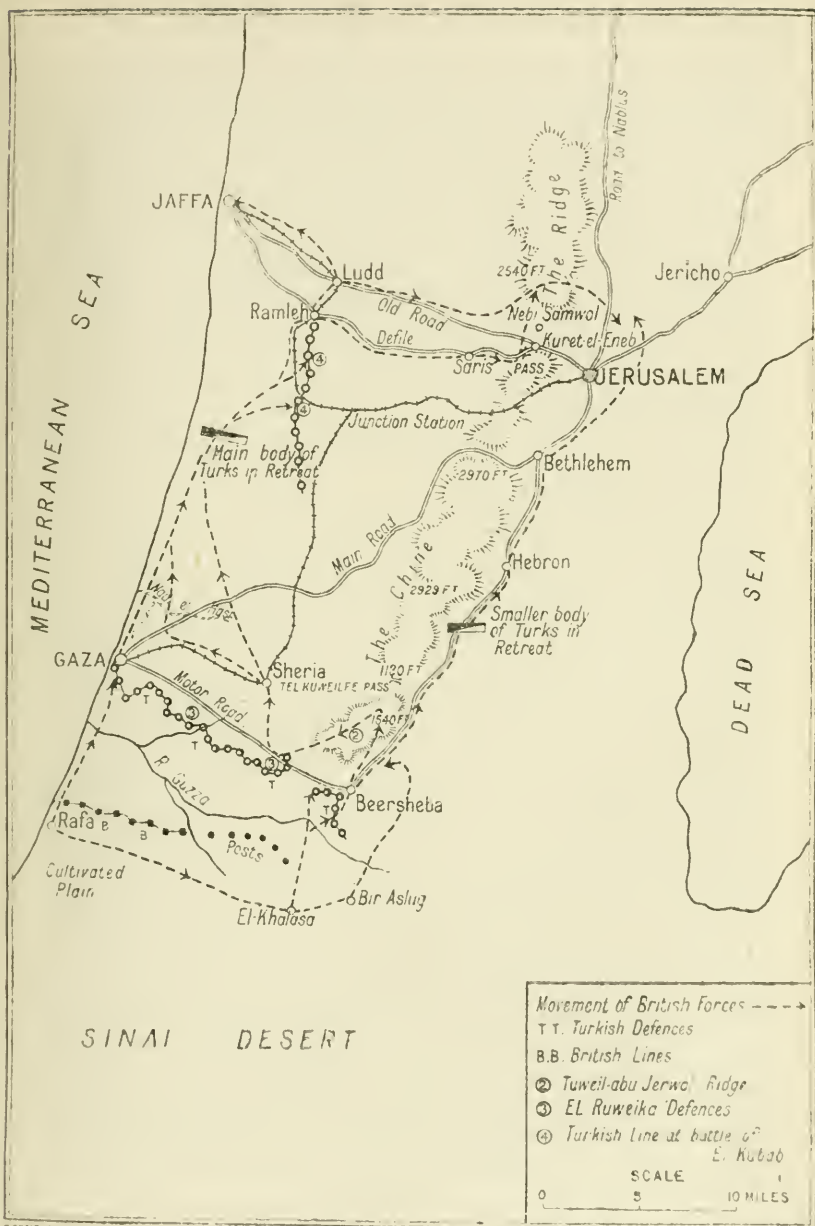
All the southern part of the coastal plain had been cleared. Save, however, its southern extremity, the enemy still kept his footing on the highland ridge; the question now was to wrest it from him.

Advance from the plain through the minor defiles facing west was impracticable. The one break of any importance was that through which was carried the Jaffa-Jerusalem road, but even that defile was narrow and the enemy had not neglected to obstruct it.

Between Hebron and Jerusalem the backbone of the uplands rises to more than 3,000 feet above sea level. There is a fall to 2,363 feet where the main road from Jaffa to Jerusalem crosses what is to all intents a broad pass, but beyond this again to the north the chine rises, attaining at its highest point an elevation of nearly 2,900 feet. As this part of the chine, known as the Nebi Samwal ridge, ran parallel with the Jerusalem-Nablus road, and as it appeared necessary to strike that road at some point north of the Holy City in order to ensure evacuation of the country to the south, the ridge had to be seized.

A movement by the yeomanry from Ramleh through the hills eastward was begun on November 17. Following secondary routes, they reached Shilta. There is a track from that place over the mountains, but it proved impassable for wheeled traffic. The move covered the flank of the advance through the main defile. The opposite flank to the south was similarly covered by an advance of the Australian Light Horse.

On November 19 the infantry set out. The opposition met with was from Turkish rearguards. By the end of that day, however, the main defile had been cleared as far east as Saris at the western foot of the pass, where the elevation is 2,000 feet. Saris had been defended with some obstinacy. Many Turkish dead were found among the rocks. For both sides this mountain cam-





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paigining was toilsome work. To the burning sirocco, which sweeping over the country from the deserts had rendered the first days and, much more, the first nights of the pursuing movement oppressive, and, in a land where it was hard to obtain water enough, had tried the endurance of the British troops to the utmost, had now succeeded heavy and continuous rain accompanied by a change from heat to cold, sharpened here by the height above sea level. At night the men rested where and as they could in the rain amid the vast boulders and rock fragments strewn this savage defile. Hard, indeed, are the labours of war, and if there is glory in it no small part of that glory, assuredly, is the discipline which can support hardships such as these with patient cheerfulness and unabated courage. The truth is more impressive than fiction.

From Saris the summit of the pass is reached by a zigzag road, about two miles in length. The enemy was prepared to dispute the passage. He had a force of some 2,000 rifles with numerous machine-guns, and the village of Kuryet-el-Enab, which marks the summit, had been organised for defence.

Early on November 20 the British troops resumed their attack, aided by an offensive movement along a secondary and nearly parallel road some miles to the north. It had been judged that to force the pass would prove a stiff if not a costly piece of work. A hostile force well armed with machine-guns in a narrow defile should without too much difficulty render it impassable. Happily, however, there were two factors in the British favour. When morning broke the whole defile was enveloped in fog. It was one effect of the cold, and it neutralised probably nine-tenths of the enemy's advantage. In the circumstances the tactic adopted was an attack with the bayonet. The men stole forward noiselessly, at their head the Gurkhas and other Indian troops, adepts at mountain warfare. The practised skill of these men was the second favourable factor. How the fight was going those in the rear could not see, but presently through the mist rolled back the cheers

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of the attackers, mingled with the crackle of rifle shots, the rapping of machine-gun volleys, and shouts of anger or terror. But the cheers dominated all these sounds, and they were sure omens of victory. The Turks were driven out of Kuryet-el-Enab at the bayonet point. The attack to the north carried the village of Beit Dukka, and gained there a footing on the chine. To clear it the troops moved from Kuryet-el-Enab along the line of the backbone northwards. By nightfall the whole Nebi Samwal ridge had been won.

The yeomanry were now thrown forward to the east of the rise, but the enemy was plainly determined to keep the Nablus road open. He had received reinforcements, was well provided with artillery, and strong in machine-guns, and it was evident that a powerful effort would have to be made to dislodge him. Indeed, the first use made of his reinforcements had been to launch two counter-attacks with the object of recovering the chine. Owing to difficulties of transport, the British had at this time only a very limited artillery support. The counter-attacks were beaten, but until the guns could be brought forward, a further advance, it was manifest, could not be essayed. All that could be done in the meantime was to consolidate the positions gained.

Nevertheless, the rapidity of the British movements had realised results which General Allenby justly described as invaluable. They had penetrated the defiles before the enemy had had the opportunity to render them impassable. "The narrow passes from the plain to the plateau of the Judean range," General Allenby observed, "have seldom been forced, and have been fatal to many invading armies. Had the attempt not been made at once, or had it been pressed with less determination, the enemy would have had time to organise his defence in the passes, and the conquest of the plateau would then have been slow, costly, and precarious. As it was, positions had been won from which the final attack could be prepared and delivered with good prospects of success."

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The enemy now resorted to the tactic of harassing local counter-attacks, carried out as far as possible by surprise. His chief efforts were still directed against the Nebi Samwal ridge. In these he incurred serious losses. The attacks proved consistently unsuccessful.

During this interval—the later part of November and the first days of December—the British were busy improving roads and tracks, and in moving forward supplies and guns.

The plan of the renewed operations was to combine the attack west of Jerusalem with an advance from the south through Hebron. Apparently on the part of the enemy the latter development, in effect a turning movement, had not been looked for on account of the rugged character of the country.

The column detailed for the purpose—the 53rd (Welsh) Division, and a regiment of cavalry—moved out from Beersheba on December 4. By nightfall on December 6 their vanguard, after an extraordinarily rugged and toilsome march, was ten miles north of Hebron, and some six miles distant from Jerusalem. The general combined attack had been fixed for the 8th, and the column from the south, having passed Bethlehem on the 7th, was intended to co-operate from positions three miles south of Jerusalem.

On December 7, however, the weather had broken. Rain fell heavily, veiling the whole of the uplands in mist, and so far obscuring the roads that movement, and especially the movement of supplies, became next to and in some instances quite impracticable. The southern column was in consequence delayed.

But the western attack had achieved results of considerable importance. Difficult as the conditions were, the troops advanced over hilly country some four miles, captured the Turkish defences both west of Jerusalem and north of the city, and, seizing the Lifta Hill, carried the front forward to within one and a half miles of the city's western walls.

Next morning (December 8), continuing the attack, the 60th and 74th Divisions fought their way north of

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Jerusalem across the Nablus road. The most formidable of the hostile positions were some tiers of trenches on the farther side of the Wadi Surar, a depression having, as usual in Palestine, precipitous sides, and at Deir Yesin, on the west of Jerusalem, fortifications called by the troops the "Heart" and "Liver" redoubts. Despite rain and mist, the Wadi Surar trenches were taken, though it looked a feat bordering on the impossible, and both "Heart" and "Liver" were torn out of the defence. At the same time, the Southern Column, which had occupied Bethlehem on the previous day, had moved to the east. In a dashing charge two battalions of Welshmen, with the Cheshires in support, had ousted the Turks from the Mount of Olives. By one of the strange vicissitudes of the War this ground of revered memories became the scene of a savage bayonet fight. The fight enabled the Southern Column to get astride the main road to Jericho. The Turks left in Jerusalem were now enclosed.

With the loss of their positions commanding the Wadi Surar went, in a military sense, and so far as Jerusalem was concerned, the Turks' last hope, and that at the Turco-German Headquarters was realised at once. From Constantinople the orders were to hold out to the last extremity. In accordance with them, Jemel Pasha telegraphed instructions to Izzet Bey, the Turkish Governor of Jerusalem, to evacuate the Jewish and Christian population. Izzet wired in reply that there were no vehicles to be had for helping the inhabitants to get away. Back came the order that the inhabitants in that case must leave on foot. Measures were therefore taken for a wholesale clearance. The police were sent round to warn religious chiefs and other leading persons to be ready to depart forthwith. When the report of the intended deportation spread, as it did with the usual rapidity of bad tidings, the non-Turkish inhabitants, knowing well what it meant, hid themselves in every cellar and lurking place. Outside was the thunder of the battle, every hour drawing nearer and growing louder; within the ramparts was terror. This was the

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state of affairs on December 8. At sunset on that day, however, the rumour got abroad that the British could be seen from the city. Part of the 60th Division had then, in fact, stormed the Lifta position, and this fighting was in full view from the walls. While the excitement of these events was at its height, a Turkish transport column galloped furiously in, and thundered along the streets towards the Jericho exit. In its wake came a panic-stricken rout of Turkish infantry, ragged, bootless, and beyond control. On sight of the flying transport, they had deserted the trenches *en masse*, and surged in by the gap in the western wall, throwing away their arms, struggling and fighting to get through first. Behind and among them were officers, some Turks, some Germans, shouting with rage; flogging the mutineers back; trying to force them to pick up abandoned rifles. The scene was pandemonium. Most, however, defied authority. By the non-Turkish inhabitants the panic was welcomed as a sign of deliverance. Of the deportation no more was heard.

All that evening (December 8) the Turkish batteries west and south-west of the city were blazing away their last shells. But that this was the closing act in the four hundred years of Turkish rule became evident when Izzet Bey towards midnight went to the telegraph office, sent the staff about their business, and, it is recorded, himself set about smashing the instruments with a hammer.<sup>1</sup> In the early hours of the morning the inhabitants from within their houses heard a steady, ceaseless, shuffling tramp. It went on hour after hour. It was the beaten army in retreat. By an interesting coincidence, the day was the Jewish Festival of the Hanukah, commemorating the deliverance of the city by Judas Maccabeus. Of the civil officials the last to depart was Izzet Bey. His final official act had been to write a letter of surrender, and send it to the Mayor, with orders to deliver it to the British commander. That done, he availed himself—Turkish fashion—of a cart and team belonging to an American resident, Mr.

<sup>1</sup> *Official Record of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*



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Vesper—the only cart and horses left in Jerusalem which till then had escaped requisition. Izzet Bey evidently had had an eye to emergencies. He rode out along the road to Jericho.

For five hours the defeated troops, sullen and weary, had shambled across the city. At dawn on December 9, while the last stragglers were leaving to the north and east, the Mayor came out at the western gap accompanied by two policemen, each carrying a white flag, and by a throng of inhabitants who on the departure of the Turks had issued from their hiding places. The Mayor walked towards Lifta. In the British lines the impending surrender was already known, for rumour of it had been circulated beyond the walls. The Mayor was taken to Headquarters of the 180th Brigade, and handed Izzet's letter to Brigadier-General Watson. Pending instructions, General Watson went back with the Mayor, placed guards over the post office, in some of the hospitals, and at the Jaffa gate, and helped to re-establish public confidence. As soon as the Turks had gone, and even before the last of them were out, crowds had stormed the Turkish barracks, and in revenge for repeated and severe requisitions, had looted them. The buildings were unroofed, doors and window frames torn out, and floorings carried away for firewood. When, however, the detachments of British infantry marched in, these disorders ceased. The capitulation was arranged with Major-General Shea.

General Allenby made his official entry on December 11. In his honour the Jaffa gate, long disused, was reopened. The general came in on foot, and the formalities were the simplest. They consisted of the reading in the English, French, Arabic, Greek, Italian, and Russian languages, from the entrance to the citadel below the Tower of David, of a proclamation that order would be maintained in all the holy places of the Jewish, Christian, and Mohammedan religions, which would be guarded and preserved for the free use of worshippers. After the proclamation, leading ecclesiastical and other notables were presented to

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the British commander. The presentations concluded, the General, again on foot, left by the Jaffa gate.

The feature of the proceedings was the crowd which witnessed them. There had been recalled in association with the event a curious Arab prediction that when the Nile flowed into Palestine a prophet from the West would drive the Turks out of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> The Nile had flowed into Palestine, though through a pipe-line, and public desire to cast eyes on the "prophet" had prevailed even over the traditional fear inspired by the long Turkish suppression of all and every assembly. From beyond memory anything in the nature of a meeting had been dealt with by the Turks as criminal conspiracy, and with a severity knowing no limits. In spite of that, the whole population now turned out. They were not molested, and to them this was a wonder, which heightened the portent. Amid every sign of common emotion priests and others embraced each other. Some, it is recorded, shed tears of joy.

From the political viewpoint the British occupation of Jerusalem was an event of first class importance. But from a military point of view it should not be forgotten that the prestige of the Turks throughout the Near East has always been essentially that of arms. By the events of this signally brilliant campaign that prestige had been brought to a point beyond precedent low. Through defeat the vitality of a military dominion is irreparably impaired. Here was revealed the radical mistake of German "penetration." It had left the Turkish Empire unable to stand alone, yet had afforded no substitute efficient to sustain the Empire against attack.

<sup>1</sup> *Official Record of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GERMAN-TURKISH REACTION IN SYRIA

Position in Syria at the end of 1917—German-Turkish measures of separation—General Allenby strikes first—Attack north of Jaffa—German-Turkish counter-move against Jerusalem—The most obstinate battle of the Campaign—Causes of the enemy's failure—British operations east of Jordan—The capture of Jericho—Value of capacity in command—Operations of the Arab forces—The British raid on Amman—Difficulties at the Jordan fords—Battle at Amman—Non-success of the British project—Advance of the IVth Turkish Army to the Jordan—New British plans—The checks at Shunet Nimrin and Es Salt—Disintegration of the British Expeditionary Force—Effects of the changes.

BETWEEN the capture of Jerusalem and the end of the British campaign in Syria there was an interval of ten months. Operations covered that length of time partly because of a Turkish counter-offensive, but chiefly because of changes in the force under General Allenby's command. The break-up of the enemy's fortified line from Gaza and Beersheba; the wedging apart of the Turkish troops into two, for the time, disconnected wings; the defeat of each of these bodies; and finally the movements by which Jerusalem had been approached from the west and south and the Turks compelled to evacuate the city, had been well-planned, swift, and in their cumulative effect crushing. This was one of the heaviest blows the German power in Turkey had yet suffered, and it was the more telling because it had fallen while public feeling over the loss of Bagdad was yet acute. Before, however, there could be further major developments in the Syria campaign, British communications, whether across Sinai or by way of Jaffa,

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had to be adapted to the new conditions. In Palestine the months of December and January are the depth of the wet season. That made for delay.

As the situation stood after the taking of Jerusalem, the Turkish troops north of that city were separated from those on the coast north of Jaffa by a tract of country well described as without roads. Apart from mountain tracks impassable for wheeled transport and difficult enough for travellers afoot or on muleback, there was—the route from Jaffa to Jerusalem excepted—no way across the Palestine ridge save through Nablus and Tul Keram. The country here is a tumble of rugged hills and desolate upland valleys. But the road through Nablus involved a long detour. The route from Jaffa to Jerusalem being now in British hands, no enemy troops could be moved from the north of Jerusalem to the north of Jaffa or *vice versa*, unless after fatiguing marches covering nearly 100 miles and with stiff gradients every mile of the way.

That was one of the main military facts of the position. The British had a good lateral communication between Jaffa and Jerusalem; the enemy had not. And what were the opposing forces? General Allenby had under his command the seven infantry divisions; the four mounted divisions; a brigade of the Imperial Camelry; a brigade of Light Armoured Cars; and three squadrons of airmen. Against him were on the coast sector the VIIIth Turkish army, von Krassenstein in command; north of Jerusalem the VIIth Turkish army, under Fevri Pasha; and east of Jordan, based upon Ammam, the IVth Turkish army, which was concerned also in resisting the advance northwards of the Arabs of the Hedjaz.

The origin of the Arab movement may here be touched upon. Professedly the aims of Enver Pasha and his party were throughout the East to exalt Islamism and defend it against infidel inroads. Actually, however, this meant, and was alike in Syria and in Arabia known to mean, a revival of Turkish power and in an aggravated form. Turkish power, unfortunately, meant misrule.

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When, therefore, in April, 1917, the Turkish garrison at Medina had been strengthened by 3,000 picked troops, the already existing distrust of the Sheerif of Mecca had deepened into alarm. By inherited right acknowledged by the Turks for more than two hundred years, he exercised an authority in the Hedjaz both political and religious. But he did not fail now to see that this semi-independent status would not last. Arabia, it was clear, was to be thoroughly Turkified. Behind this, too, was observed at Constantinople the German hand. Hence, alike on religious and on political grounds, the Sheerif and his Arabs were ripe for revolt, and in June, 1917, the discontent came to a head. The Turks held Mecca by means of forts and fortified barracks. These were besieged. The garrison opened fire upon the city with their guns, and even the Great Mosque did not escape damage. After being beleaguered for a month, however, the Turks in Mecca capitulated. Then the revolt spread to places on the coast and to both the south and north. At Taif the Arabs besieged and took prisoners Ghabil Pasha, the Governor-General of the Hedjaz, and 3,000 Turkish regulars. Next, with British aid in the form of arms and munitions, they cut off Medina. To storm the place was out of the question. It was held by some 14,000 men and strongly fortified. But it was blockaded, and the blockade kept up until the end of the war. In the meantime, part of the Arab forces moved north against Maan.

Such was the position when news reached Constantinople of the defeat in Palestine. The news fell with the effect of a thunderbolt. Efforts were at once set on foot to repair the disaster. The reinforcements en route to and from Damascus were hurried south. They included a contingent of Germans as well as all the machine-gun teams that could be mustered.

North of Jaffa the Turks still held spurs of high ground which gave them observation over the town and brought the port within range of their heavy artillery. And they were well aware of the importance of this menace. If the British became able freely to use the port of Jaffa,



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poor though its facilities then were, the British would be able to overcome one of the worst impediments of their campaign—the distribution over as yet indifferent roads of supplies from Rafa, and the advanced railheads. Naturally, then, the Yilderim Group did its utmost to make the port of Jaffa unsafe. North of Jerusalem, too, the Turkish lines were not more than four miles from the city, and were there established on the most rugged knot of all the rugged country between Jordan and the sea. Apparently this inspired the Germans at Constantinople and Falkenhayn to embark upon a strong counter-stroke. Their intention, resuming the offensive, was to attack Jerusalem from the north and east, and cutting in between that city and Gaza, to roll up the British line towards Jaffa. Preparations for this attack were, under pressure, completed within a month.

Nevertheless, General Allenby was first active. At this time, of course, neither side knew the projects of the other, but acting according to the situation as it stood, the British commander saw that further and instant action was called for alike to push the enemy out of range of Jaffa ; to render the British communications between Jaffa and Jerusalem secure, and, not least, to safeguard his possession of Jerusalem. The chief difficulty had arisen from the rains. Under the military traffic they had now to bear the roads had been churned into quagmires. Motors and vehicles could not for the time be employed, and transport both of supplies and of material for railway construction was slowed down. In brief, the only course was to take the situation in hand boldly, and strike while the chance offered and while the enemy was still feeling the effects of his reverses.

The British General's opening was north of Jaffa. In natural features the positions the Turks had fallen back upon there were strong. The spurs in their possession were about a third of a mile beyond the Nahr el Auja, which river finds its way into the sea five miles north of Jaffa and down a flat-floored valley at this season swampy. Besides the boggiess of the

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ground along its banks, the Auja, 120 feet in width, is, when in flood, as it now was, ten feet deep, and impassable afoot save at a few points where it foams over bars of sand and shingle. A crossing of the valley in the face of fire from the cliff-like bluffs, the fordable places being perfectly well known, did not appear promising. That very fact, however, turned out a help. It left an opening for surprise.

The business was assigned to the 52nd Division. On the plan submitted by Major-General Hill and approved at General Headquarters, the troops were to cross the Auja by night, and, covered by the mist, to advance to the bluffs as silently as possible and attack with the bayonet. No shot was to be fired.

A scheme of that kind, needless to say, had to be worked out very carefully. There had to be no loose ends, and there were none. On December 20, after nightfall, the 52nd Division set out from Jaffa. The night was wet and windy. As the troops tramped over the sodden ground its sloppiness deadened their tread. On the ford at the mouth of the Auja the depth of water was found to be four feet, and the covering troops of the brigade on this the left of the line passed over in single file, followed, when a bridgehead had been secured, by the others. Just as day was breaking the brigade swarmed up the bluffs. The Turks, who had been keeping under shelter, were literally caught napping. When they awoke to the disagreeable facts they ran.

No shot had been fired because meanwhile the brigades in the centre and on the right had had to cross the river, partly on canvas coracles each holding twenty men. Also there had been brought along portable bridges, and canvas raft pontoons so designed that the parts could be speedily "assembled." As every precaution had had to be taken lest these preparations should leak out, the construction work had been done by the engineers in the orange groves of Sarona. It had remained secret. To deaden the sound of the gun carriage wheels the bridges were spread with matting.

The covering force was poled across in the coracles

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while the river was being bridged, and in the rain and darkness one Turkish post after another was silently surprised. Over before daylight and formed up, both brigades rushed the hostile defences. Two not a little astonished Turkish battalion commanders were among the captures.

So much for the attack northwards. The enemy, however, also held, farther inland, positions astride the valley of the Auja, one of them named Bald Hill, and these flanked the coastal advance. They received the attention of the 54th Division, which here captured two villages, and pushed the Turks out of the orchards where they had established themselves. As the Turkish forces withdrew, they were followed up by the airmen, while from seaward the warships raked the line of retreat. The enemy was driven back five miles.

It had been intended to round off this stroke on the coast by another north of Jerusalem, but there the Turco-Germans got their blow in first, and it brought about the most obstinate battle of the Syrian campaign.

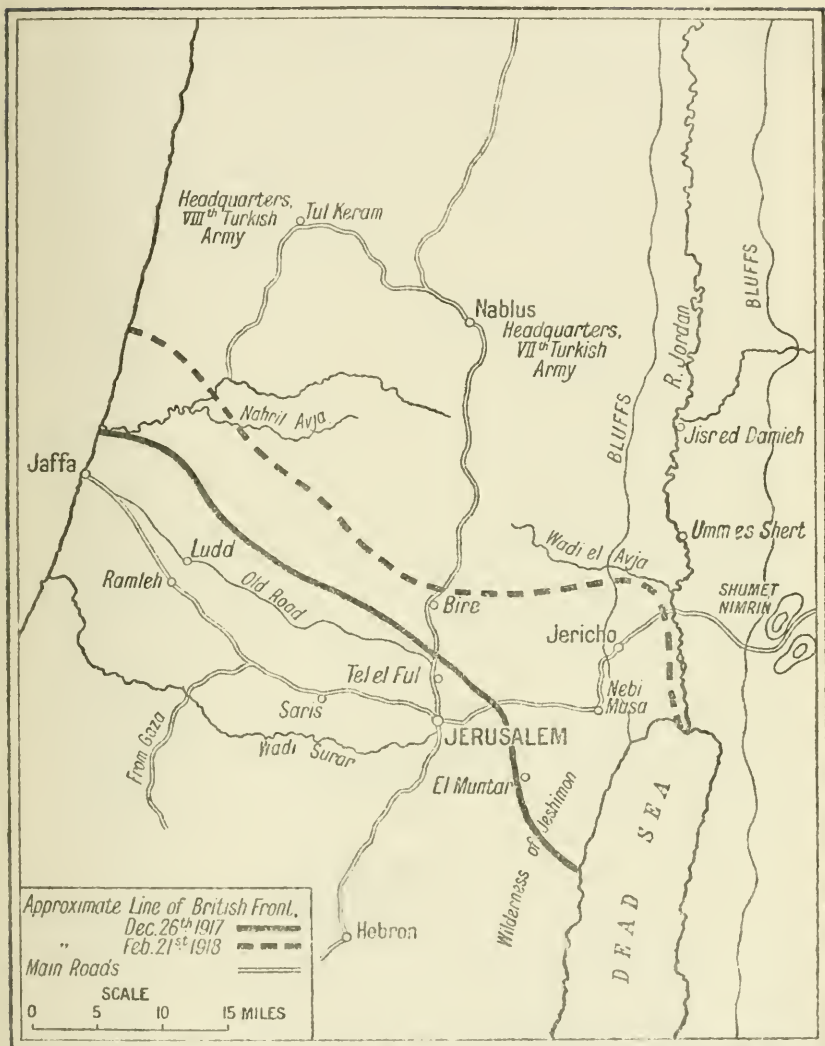
The onset was a main thrust astride the Nablus-Jerusalem road, and, as already noted, a turning movement round by the east and south of the city. The British lines north of Jerusalem were held by the 60th Division; those to the east by the 53rd.

The extreme right of the 53rd was a post at the hamlet of Deir Ibn Obeid on the mountain road leading from the Jordan valley to Bethlehem. A company of the Middlesex Regiment stationed here found themselves attacked by a column 700 strong, but repelled assault after assault, and held out for three days.

During those three days the battle had gone on, sustained on the side of the enemy, not by his defeated divisions, but by fresh troops, and those the best he still had at his disposal.

Just to the east of the Nablus-Jerusalem road and opposite to the Nebi Samwal ridge, is a bold hump, 2,794 feet high, called Tel el Ful. The road to Nablus runs between the two elevations. The British troops held both, and the seizure of Tel el Ful was evidently

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the chief aim of the attack, for this rock not only commanded the road to the north, but to the south overlooked Jerusalem. Though, however, the capture of Tel el Ful was the chief aim, the assault was not limited to that point. It was thrown against the whole line of the 60th Division, and part of the line of the 53rd. It began on December 26 with a night attack on the outposts of the 60th Division at Ras el Tawil and in the quarries to the north of Tel el Ful. The outposts were driven in. Next day the main contending forces were at grips. On the Tel el Ful position the Turkish assault, in spite of earlier failures, was pressed to the main line of the defence. In all there were eight enemy attacks, and all through the night of December 27 and all along the line the battle raged. The morning of December 28 saw a sullen breathing time. That there was a German hand behind this onset was evident alike from its obstinacy, reflecting a cold rage, and from the recklessness respecting losses. Only the final tactic was needed to prove that Falkenhayn was the inspiring genius. So far, nevertheless, the Turkish attacks had not made the desired impression. Because they had not, the whole enemy force was gathered up and with a crashing suddenness hurled against the British line. The line shook under the impact, but it held. Here and there the assault drove forward to the main defences. Such grips, however, were both too few and too restricted. They were almost instantly chopped off. The Turkish force had risen to its supreme effort, and it was the greatest Turkish effort in the war. It recoiled severely mauled.

This was the moment chosen by General Allenby to disclose his reply. Relying in the defensive on his local reserves, and they had served him well, he had held the 10th and 74th Divisions on leash and had massed them against the enemy's right, west of the Nablus road. And there they scaled two ridges each running from west to east, and pushed along them. They were descending from these captured heights just as the last hostile attack east of the road was recoiling, and they menaced



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the communication with Nablus. In order to keep his line of retreat open the enemy commander had in these circumstances no choice save to throw against this counter-attack all the strength he could collect. It was in accordance with that necessity that in all haste he moved his 1st Division from Birch westward. That he must do so had been foreseen, and because it was foreseen the 60th Division also struck out. There was thus a British movement south to north and west to east at the same time. And the enemy was no longer able to hold it. Some stiff ridges had to be climbed, but the British advance pushed on, and one ridge after another was carried by storm. Nor did the movement, continued on December 29, pause until seven miles of the hill country had been wrested from the hostile grasp. Before the battle an arc, covering Jerusalem east and north, the British line now ran from the east of Jerusalem across the ridges to the north-west. It had been straightened out, and some of the strongest points were on or behind it. Besides it was now eleven miles from Jerusalem instead of only four. Though not quite in the manner he had expected, the aim of General Allenby had been achieved. By comparison comfortable and secure, he could improve his communications without serious hindrance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Engineers having completed the first part of their task, namely, the provision of a sufficient supply of water to enable General Allenby's army to march on Jerusalem, next turned their attention to roads. When the capital of Palestine had fallen, however, they were again confronted with the problem of providing water, not only for the army and its numerous appurtenances, but for the population of the Holy City itself.

When our troops entered Jerusalem the sources of water supply were : (1) Rain-water, stored in cisterns ; (2) Aqueduct-borne water from Solomon's Pools, a quantity of 40,000 gallons per day ; (3) The Pool of Siloam, practically liquid sewage.

Our troops perforce drew heavily upon this supply during the winter, and it was necessary, in order to avoid a dangerous shortage, to take steps that would become operative before the rainless summer was upon the city. The scheme proposed by the Engineers and successfully carried out is rich in historic and even romantic associations. It was based on a modification of the Herod-Pontius Pilate system. The ancient engineers of the Roman world had carried the water of the Wadi Arrub springs in rock-cut channels to a reservoir of 4,000,000

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So far as an advance upon Damascus was concerned this, after the further heavy reverse the enemy had met with, seemed a rare opportunity. Three Turkish armies had been beaten in succession. But, on the other hand, the season and the state of communications imposed a veto. Communications had already been stretched, and from the base at Rafa were still imperfect. Even, therefore, if at this juncture the enemy were pushed north, all the probabilities were that his forces would elude the grasp of the attack, and rally with increasing advantage. And General Allenby was not in the field to gain territory on those terms; the purpose of the campaign was to destroy German-Turkish power.

For the present, then, patience had to be exercised. Patience, however, did not mean inactivity. It was a further condition of an advance upon Damascus that the Turks beyond Jordan should be dealt with. With all the country east of the Jordan valley still in the enemy's hands, and the crossings of the river at his command, there was, seeing that the strategical railway from Damascus to Medina and Arabia ran south within striking distance of the Jordan valley and of the Dead Sea, all the probability of a diversion in strength against the British right. The Damascus main railway afforded an opening for hostile raids towards Rafa round by the south of the Dead Sea, and there was no reason to pre-

gallons capacity, and thence to Jerusalem by a masonry aqueduct *via* the Pools of Solomon. So now the rock-cut channels leading from the springs were thoroughly cleansed—they were blocked with an accumulation which can literally be described as “the dust of ages,” including the remains of several individuals who may have belonged to almost any period. Next the ancient reservoir was repaired, pumps were installed, pumping water to a newly erected reservoir of 300,000 gallons capacity at a point near the springs, whence water flowed by the force of gravity to a reservoir constructed on a high point west of Jerusalem, so that now it was possible for water-pipes to carry a supply to any point in the town itself.

This water system in Jerusalem was laid down primarily for immediate military necessities, and partly in order to recoup the civilian population for the water consumed by the army, but the installation will be of permanent value to the city. Twelve miles of pipe-line had been laid to ensure this result. The daily supply was 280,000 gallons.—*Official Records of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*

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sume that the opening, if left, would be neglected. Besides, the British were acting hand in hand with the forces of the Sultan of the Hedjaz. Seeing that the Allied Arabs were moving north along the railway, to secure the crossings of Jordan and turn the tables on the enemy by threatening the railway would materially assist them. To that, accordingly, the British commander turned his attention. His design was both to obtain command of the Dead Sea and eventually to use the country round Jericho as a starting point for a thrust towards Amman. Strategically, the latter purpose was linked up with further major operations northwards, and those, as already seen, with important preparations. For the time the larger design was not practicable, but it was practicable at once to push the British line east of Jerusalem to the Jordan valley and to seize Jericho, and this would be a useful instalment.

Jericho, situated on the main eastward road from Jerusalem, controls what has always been one of the chief crossings of the Jordan valley. The knot of rugged country north-east of Jerusalem presents some peculiar features. Its highest points range from 2,000 to 3,000 feet above sea level. The floor of the Jordan valley, on the other hand, is in places 1,200 feet *below* sea level, so that between the extremes there is a difference of 4,000 feet. And the fall is abrupt. Coming to the eastward edge of the plateau the traveller is suddenly confronted with this profound gulf down which Jordan winds like a silver ribbon. It is a scene of savage and solitary grandeur. On the farther side, fronted by the scrub-covered foothills, rise the cliffs and mountains of Moab. Both west and east the bluffs of the valley are ruptured by fissures which in the wet months of the year pour out foaming torrents. The fissures or wadis scoring the plateau on the Palestine side are short, and as the fall in some cases is 3,000 feet within a few miles, the water during the rains boils down them in a succession of cataracts. The wadis therefore are defiles between walls of rick ruggedly terraced, and often broken by smaller gorges.

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In shape the southern part of this hilly tract is roughly triangular, its limit to the north-east the gorge called the Wadi el Auja. It was the plan of General Allenby to seize the plateau as far as that gorge.

The battle began on February 19. In the interval since the end of December the 53rd and 60th Divisions had changed places. The 60th now held the line east of Jerusalem, with the 53rd on their left astride the Nablus road. A strong point of the enemy's line slightly south-east of Jerusalem, and between the city and the Dead Sea, was the conspicuous hill, El Muntar, 1,723 feet above sea level. It was the intention, throwing the chief weight of the British push against that wing, to deprive the Turks of this position. But the British attack, though pivoting on the left, was to extend along the whole front, and a feature of it was to be a movement by the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division, who from behind and round the south of El Muntar were crossing the wilderness of Jishimon to strike the Pilgrim road over Jordan just above the Dead Sea, and pushing up the Jordan valley cut off the retreat of the Turks issuing from the Palestine plateau through the Jericho defile.

On the front east of Jerusalem the Turks were estimated from Intelligence Service reports to have an effective infantry strength of 5,000, with another 2,000 rifles disposed on the plateau to the north. This muster was not by itself formidable. What made it serious was the character of the ground.

El Muntar was taken on the first day. Other notable feats were the captures of Talaat ed Dumm and Jebel Ekteif, hummocks commanding the main road to Jericho. There was but one means of approach to the Jebel Ekteif fastness, but with the help of a smartly managed feint it was stormed by the 179th Brigade (Brigadier-General FitzEdwards). Talaat ed Dumm was taken by the 180th (Brigadier-General Carleton). Unable to offer a rigid opposition the enemy fell back upon an elastic defence, and retired from ridge to ridge. To cross the gorges men had to pull each other up from terrace to



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terrace with ropes, or descend in like fashion. Various, too, were the contrivances for bridging the chasms. This was fatiguing work. Nevertheless by February 20 the line had been pushed to within four miles of Jericho.

The turning movement of the Mounted Division did not, as was hoped, bar the Jericho exit, for to begin with the enemy hung on to the wild uplands between the Pilgrims' road and the Dead Sea, and ousting him proved no easy affair. In places the track was so rugged and narrow that the Australians and New Zealanders had to ride single file and in face of machine-gun fire. At one particularly ticklish point, the crossing of the Wadi Mujelik, it looked as if the force would be held up, but a brigade of the Australians found a way round, and in the early morning of February 21 the Division descending from the highlands through the gorge of Kumran debouched into the Jordan valley, by way of the village of Neby Musa. They found that place evacuated. Losing no time, they dashed on to Jericho ten miles off. The Turks, however, had left in the course of the night. Thus the turning movement resulted in no captures. But it had collapsed the opposition, and from that point the advance of the British line to the cliffs overlooking the Jordan valley became a walk over. Jericho was now held by one of the mounted regiments.

Further operations were now undertaken to bring the British front as a whole into alignment with these revised dispositions, and incidentally by seizing positions of tactical importance to economise the forces with which the front could be held. The positions included the Tel Asur, one of the loftiest spines along the Palestine backbone. From this mountain, 3,318 feet high, the wadi or gorge of the Auja opened on the east; and past the foot of the height on the west ran the Nablus road. The position was captured by troops of the 53rd Division, and the enemy liked the loss—it was a bad loss—so little that he tried more than once to cancel it. He failed, and the more heavily because his attacks were resolute.

Into the details of these operations, which lasted until



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the middle of March, it is not necessary further to enter. It is enough to say that while tending to economise forces, they improved the situation from the standpoint of a general forward move when the time came. But the uniform success with which they were carried out reflected that most important quality in an army—ability on the part of commanders of units, and of companies to carry out their shares with resource and initiative. Put a great general at the head of an Expedition, and his orders command confidence. There is in their execution zeal and readiness to accept responsibility. The influence of good generalship strikes right through an army and right down to the rank and file; indeed, is felt most strongly among the rank and file, and it is so powerful a moral stiffening that men will cheerfully endure labours, hardships, and exposures, under which otherwise they would be swept off by discouragement and sickness wholesale. There are military details which have, it may be, no enduring interest as history, but as moral teachings are permanent, and if we seek for the cause of that sweeping success which marked the close of the Syrian campaign we find it in this constructive working up which made the Syrian Expeditionary Force an instrument, for its numbers, invincible.

Another effect of the present operations was to render it far less easy for the enemy, embarrassed on the west, to interrupt the crossings of the Jordan valley. At this time the Sherif Feisal, at the head of the Hedjaz forces, had arrived within seven miles of Maan. On the wings of his main body one column had worked to the north-west of Maan, cutting a branch light railway on that side, and another had raided the Damascus trunk line thirty miles north of Maan. There had also been fighting close to the south of the Dead Sea. In that area the Turks held El Tafilé. Besieged by the Arabs the garrison of El Tafilé was compelled to capitulate. From Karak an enemy relief column with two guns and 27 machine-guns was sent out, but in a battle with the Arabs at El Tafilé (January 26, 1918) this column had met with a disastrous

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reverse, losing 700 in killed and prisoners, together with both its guns and machine-guns. Enemy reinforcements had then been hurried south from Damascus, among them a battalion of German infantry, and a second expedition to El Tafilé was organised on a larger footing. In the face of this force the Arabs at that place, declining to risk a battle, withdrew south to Shobak. The expedition left it evident that in German-Turkish estimation the El Tafilé position south of the Dead Sea was of consequence.

It was believed by General Allenby that a raid upon Ammam, if it resulted in cutting the Damascus railway, would have the effect at once of embarrassing the defence of Maan, and of causing the force at El Tafilé to be called in. And as regards El Tafilé it had that effect. El Tafilé was evacuated and reoccupied by the Arabs in March. The proposed Trans-Jordan raid was not unattended by difficulties. There were from Jericho to Ammam thirty miles of country to cover, reckoning as the crow flies. But to the level of the plateau of Moab from the Jordan valley was a climb of 4,000 feet, most of the way through rugged hills, and the only practicable road was a devious one, winding, after leaving the Jordan flats, north to Es Salt, then turning east and slightly south. The reason for this roundabout route lay to begin with in the necessity of avoiding the crossing of the numerous wadis descending from the Moab plateau into the Jordan hollow, and next in that of getting round the mountain range west of Ammam. The route therefore followed the course of one of the main confluent valleys, the Wadi Shaib, and was cut along the slopes at a height sufficient to avoid floods. Past side gorges the roadway was carried on embankments pierced with arches to let through the flood water. This route, paved as far as Es Salt, was a military work carried out by German engineers with the object, among others, of sending troops as quickly as possible from Es Salt south-west to Jericho, and Jerusalem.

For the British raid the force selected consisted of the 60th Division; the Australian and New Zealand

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Mounted troops ; the Camelry ; the Mountain Artillery ; the Light Armoured Cars ; and a battery of heavy guns. They were to advance to Es Salt, and while the infantry occupied that place with a mounted brigade as flank covering, the rest of the force was to move upon Ammam, following over the latter part of the route a shorter track across the mountains.

The plan, as a plan, was sound enough. Unfortunately the movement happened to coincide with a spell of heavy rain, and this meant slow going. The surface of the plateau of Moab is a bed of clay, and on the slippery tracks the camels especially were hard put to it to get along. The camel is used to dry, firm sand. He has not a foot adapted for wet marl, and picks up pounds of the stuff at every step, a state of things which soon reduces him both to bad temper and exhaustion. The conditions, in fact, were depressing all round. Even at the outset there were adventures not in the programme. The Jordan rose in spate nine feet. According to time table there was on the night of March 21 to be a crossing by means of rafts, and this was to be effected by the 180th Brigade of the 60th Division at two points—Ghoraniyeh, where the main road goes over from Jericho, and Makhadet Hajlah, where the Pilgrim road passes the river by a ford. The wooden bridge at Ghoraniyeh had gone—part of the wreckage of war. But when the rafts were launched the current swept them away. Pontoons were then brought along and shoved off. They, too, went spinning down stream. Some daring fellows of the 2/17th Londons tried to swim over with a line, but found themselves helpless, and had to be hauled in. Jordan with all the lesser spates from the uplands tumbling into it defied control. Nor were rafts any more use at the lower ford. There, however, some swimmers did get over,<sup>1</sup> and a line was fixed which enabled the covering troops to be ferried to the further

<sup>1</sup> Men of the 2/19th Batt. London Regiment—ten in all. They were:—2nd Lieut. G. E. Jones, M.C. ; Corpl. E. Margrave ; L/Corpl. W. H. Henderson ; L/Corpl. F. Popham, *Médaille Militaire* ; L/Corpl. W. V. Davies ; L/Corpl. H. Silver ; Pte. A. C. Hardwicke ; Pte. H. Hoxton ; Pte. J. R. Powell ; Pte. R. W. Williams.—*Official Record*.

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bank. Of course, when day broke it was impossible that these doings should not be seen from the heights by the enemy, and he lined up along the foothills and promptly, to the best of his ability, made himself unpleasant. A bridgehead was formed on the farther bank, but there was sniping and counter-sniping all the way round it, and the bridge had to be constructed under shell fire. The enemy also turned some batteries on to the Ghoraniyeh passage, where on the second night there was another effort to get over. Meanwhile, however, the bold Turk had come down to the opposite bank, and it was necessary to send the Auckland Mounted Rifles over by the Pilgrims' Ford bridge, and drive him off.

Thus it was not until March 24 that the Expedition got fairly under way. The troops of the 60th Division were then sent forward in an attack upon El Haud, and Shumet Nimrin, the hills on each side of the Wadi Shaib. They carried both, and from that time, with the Wellington Mounted Rifles and the 3rd Australian Light Horse as an advance guard, had the enemy on the run. On the evening of March 25 Es Salt was reached and occupied. There was no opposition.

From Es Salt the Mobile Column, with three mountain batteries, set out for Amman as arranged by the track over the mountains. The roughness and bad state of the tracks, however, made the guns and other wheeled transport an impediment. Either the dash, which threatened to become a crawl, had to be given up, or guns and transport had to be sent back. They were sent back. The movement thus became an affair of mounted men only, and there were places where even they had not only to dismount, but to push up the horses.

Descending from the mountains towards Amman, they came into a region studded with masses of isolated and broken rock, and patches of scrub. Here the opposition again showed itself, snipers and machine-gunners lurking behind and grasshopping from every bit of cover. And there were the inevitable wadis to get over. On March 27 the Column divided; the New Zealanders striking for the railway to the south of



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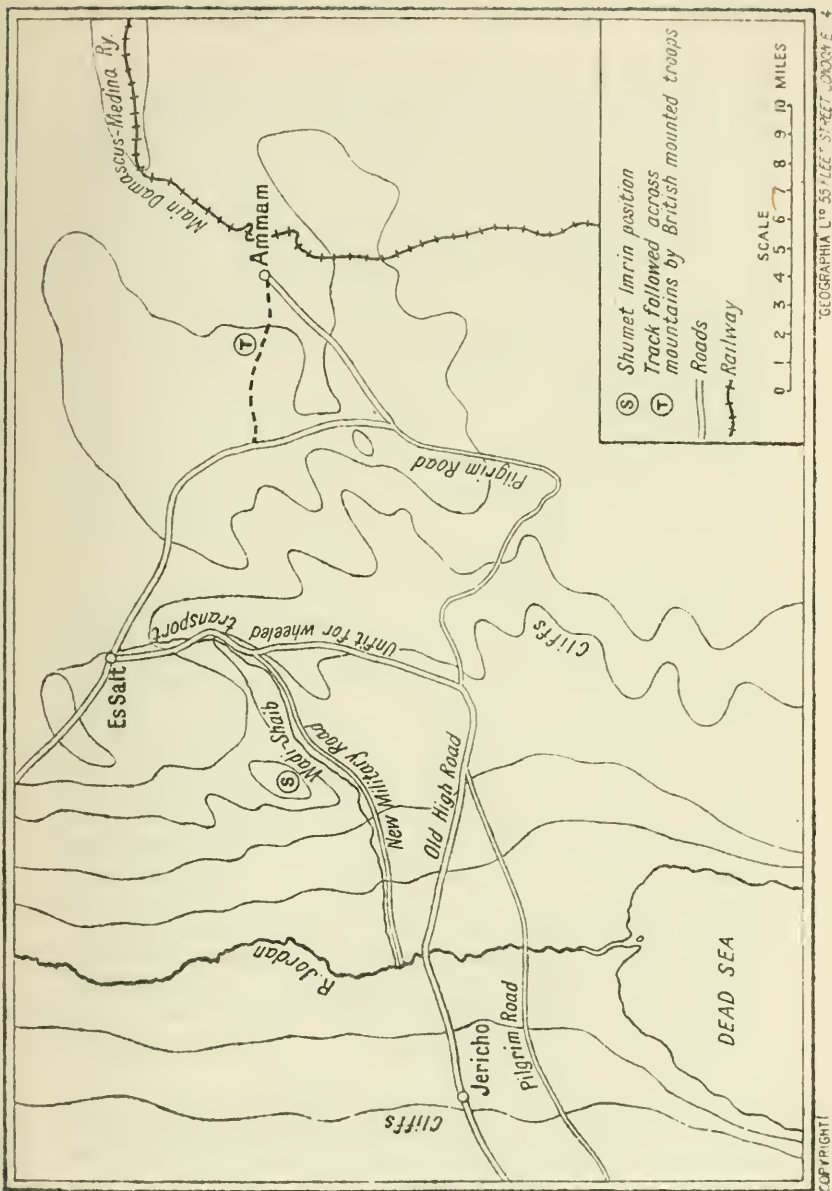
Ammam ; the Australians to the north, the Camelry in the centre for the town. Just to the north of Ammam there is a viaduct and a tunnel. This was the real objective, but it was precisely the point at which the Turks had concentrated 4,000 rifles and 15 guns. Counter-attacked in a strength they could not cope with, the Australians only succeeded in getting on to the railway at one place, seven miles north of Ammam, where they blew up a bridge. In the centre, too, the Camelry had been held off. To the south the New Zealanders had reached the railroad track, and had proceeded to tear it up for a length of five miles, and destroy several culverts.

Such was the state of affairs on March 28. A brigade of the 60th Division (the 181st) had meanwhile followed up along the Es Salt-Ammam road, finding by the side of the route twenty-two motor lorries and other vehicles, in which apparently the Turkish reinforcements had been brought along. All these conveyances, hopelessly embedded in the mud, were finished off. In conjunction with the mounted men the infantry brigade attacked, but lacking the support of field-guns—only mountain guns could be transported—the enterprise made no impression. Frankly the situation was a stalemate.

Next day on the British side two more battalions of infantry arrived and a battery of horse artillery ; on the Turkish side also more reinforcements. The British now undertook a night attack upon Ammam and the positions the enemy held covering the place. Though some of the New Zealanders penetrated into the town and there was fighting in the streets, the attack as an operation was not successful. The Ammam "citadel" defied capture. In the circumstances retreat had become the only course. Happily it was not molested. What with forced marches to the scene of action and heavy fighting on the spot the enemy was too fagged at once to follow up.

He had, however, by drawing upon his troops to the south, part of the garrison of Maan among them, by now massed round Ammam some 8,000 infantry, and





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the sequel was soon apparent in his appearance on the east side of the Jordan valley. Re-seizing the hills at the entrance of the Wadi Shaib, he descended towards the Ghoraniyeh crossing, and tried to wipe out the British bridgehead. The effort resulted in a repulse. Thereupon he proceeded to fortify the Shumet Nimrin hill.

This circumstance suggested a project for cutting him off, and since Shumet Nimrin was held by some 5,000 Turkish troops, the project appeared a great stroke. The idea was to attack at Shumet Nimrin, and at the same time to send up the Jordan valley a strong British mounted column, which, striking up the wadis to the east, and across upland tracks, was to take and hold Es Salt. Upon the road from Es Salt the Turkish force on Shumet Nimrin was dependent. Its supplies endangered, if not cut off, it would be compelled to retire upon Ammam as best it could across a rugged country without roads, exposed to the assaults of Arab irregulars who had promised their support.

On paper a good scheme. But on the other hand the move of the enemy upon Shumet Nimrin had been bold, and it soon appeared that there was a capable control behind his doings. The force at Shumet Nimrin was both an obstruction to British operations across Jordan and a threat to the flank of the British line in Palestine, and, as such a threat, in the way of an advance northwards. The move of the enemy was calculated.

While in accordance with the new British plan the 60th Division attacked at Shumet Nimrin, the Mounted Column had, by the routes prescribed, moved out and again occupied Es Salt. The Column comprised part of the Desert Mounted Corps and the Imperial Service Cavalry. Arriving after a rapid ride, the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade found Es Salt full of enemy troops and transport. The Brigade seized the junction of the Ammam and Shumet Nimrin roads, and the General Headquarters Staff of the IVth Turkish Army only escaped by the narrowest possible shave.

To guard against a hostile surprise from the west across the Jordan valley the force at Es Salt posted to

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the north-west an Australian mounted brigade astride the track from the Jordan crossing at Jisr ed Damieh, and the brigade in turn threw out an advanced detachment of the 11th Australian Light Horse which on the east bank of Jordan held the high ground just above and commanding the crossing at Umm es Shert. From these points on Jordan ran the two tracks to Es Salt.

But the enemy converged upon Es Salt from across Jordan on the one side, and from Ammam on the other. He was, of course, alive to the effect of this British manoeuvre on his force at Shumet Nimrin, and he was not disposed to allow that force to be jeopardised. Across Jordan he sent part of his 24th Division, together with his 3rd Division of Cavalry. From Ammam he sent two battalions of infantry joined *en route* by more cavalry moved south along the Damascus railway. The Ammam column was strengthened besides with heavy artillery.

The enemy move across Jordan eastwards was so planned that the Australian brigade was cut off from its advanced detachment. The Brigade—the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th Regiments of Light Horse—was by superior numbers driven through the hills to the north-west and forced to strike for safety south-west along the Wadi es Abyad. It got out, but lost its guns. One fell over a precipice; the others, since there were no tracks fit for anything on wheels, had to be left behind. The retreat lay through a country cut up by gorges so steep that many of the pack animals fell down the chasms and perished.

In the meantime the enemy's Ammam column had attacked Es Salt, and though the attack had been beaten off, nevertheless, in view of the hostile convergence, the British force had to withdraw. The Turks at Shumet Nimrin, too, had held on tenaciously. The advanced works were captured, but it had become evident that to take the position by storm would be an expensive affair. The attack therefore was not pressed. In brief, beyond the further losses inflicted on the enemy this British scheme had not been successful.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TURKISH OVERTHROW

Re-organisation of the British forces—Strengths of the combatants—The lines of the new British offensive—Reasons for the scheme—Its boldness—German-Turkish precautions—General Allenby's ruses—Opening of the attack on the hostile right—Rupture of the enemy's front—The dash north of the Mounted troops—Combat at El Lejjun—Capture of El Fule, and of the enemy headquarters at Nazareth—Flight of Liman von Sandars—Occupation of Beisan—The enemy forces west of Jordan entrapped—Efforts of the VIIth Turkish Army to get out—The British converging pressure—The Turkish *débâcle*.

It will have been observed that during that phase of the Syrian campaign which began in September, 1917, and ended in the middle of March, 1918, the military ascendancy of the British forces had been brilliantly asserted and uniformly maintained. After that the ascendancy became qualified. True, the first and strongest Turkish reaction encountered the British army in the flush of triumph, when confidence had reached its highest point. The enemy reaction was disastrous, and it enfeebled further reaction. All these efforts, too, went to dry up the Turkish reserves. At the same time, the second Turkish effort, though feebler, was in its results conspicuously more encouraging. It had not only pushed back the British from the east of Jordan, but at the end of June had left the Turks defiantly established in a fortified position menacing the British flank.

The real cause of all this was, to speak plainly, that after the German offensive in France in March, 1918, the British Government, raking round for means to repair

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the Western situation, started, among other measures, to pull the army in Syria to pieces. The wholeness of the force as a fighting entity appears in this emergency to have received only slight consideration. Withdrawals were on an important scale. They included the 52nd and 74th Divisions; twenty-four battalions of infantry cut off from the remaining divisions; nine regiments of yeomanry; five and a half batteries of siege guns and five companies of machine-gunners. The balance of the original force was thus brought down to five reduced divisions, having an incomplete equipment, and on top of this there was the wastage which had been incurred. In all, by the end of June fifty battalions of infantry had been recalled.

Of course, if they could not have been replaced the campaign in Syria would have been crippled. They were replaced, though the replacement took time, by Indian troops. The 7th (Meerut) Division and the 3rd (Lahore) Division were transferred from Mesopotamia; regiments of Indian cavalry from France took the place of the Yeomanry; battalions of infantry newly raised in India also arrived, and composite Indian battalions from France formed of companies sliced off existing corps. The final change, in July, was the withdrawal of ten more battalions of British infantry, making in all sixty out of the original ninety-one, the gap filled once more by Indian battalions.

These facts are not touched upon in order to suggest that the Indian troops were of inferior military value. They were not. The troops of the British-Indian Army are of the first grade. The point is the working disorganisation. Time had to elapse before as a fighting unity and as a whole the force could recover from these wholesale alterations. It had to be re-formed, and brought up to the point at which once more it could act effectively as a whole. The work in that direction already accomplished had, in short, to be begun over again. Nor was it a simple question of numbers; it was a question of the common animating spirit. Inevitably for the time being General Allenby found himself reduced



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to the defensive, an active defensive, it is true, for the boldest face had to be put upon matters, but still a defensive. Not a situation encouraging for an energetic commander who had held the enemy in the hollow of his hand, and possibly a situation which could not be avoided, but one quite sufficient to explain the turn of events.

And it was not a situation which the enemy on his part was likely to neglect. On the north side of the Wadi el Auja the British had seized a commanding height called Abu Tellul. It gave them the means of crossing the valley, and the enemy desired to deprive them of that advantage. This was now one of the points of a fresh attack, the other being the crossing of Jordan at El Hendu ford some five miles above where the river enters the Dead Sea. In each of these assaults, forming part of one enterprise, the proportion of German troops employed was considerable. It was very seriously meant finally to pin the British force in Syria down. By the same manœuvre of thrusting in behind the advance posts used in the operations towards Es Salt, Abu Tellul was captured. The German attack was made by night, and had been a surprise. Before, however, they had been on the hummock an hour, the attackers had a surprise in their turn—a counter-attack by the 1st Australian Light Horse which swept them off it. A good many, including 276 Germans, could not get off, and finding themselves surrounded laid down their arms. The hostile loss was heavy. The main position retaken, the advance posts, which had gallantly held out, were relieved.

Nor had better fortune attended the El Hendu undertaking. Crossing higher up stream a brigade of Indian cavalry had moved down the east bank, and keeping behind concealing ridges had suddenly charged into the hostile column with the lance and scattered it. Here, too, surprise had been met by surprise.

July, August, and part of September were taken up with the work of getting the army in Syria once more into shape. It was formed as before into seven divisions

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of infantry, two Indian, the others composite; two divisions of cavalry; and two divisions of mounted infantry. More recently arrived reinforcements included a French contingent; an Italian detachment;<sup>1</sup> two Jewish battalions (the 38th and 39th Royal Fusiliers) the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the West Indian Regiment; Armenians of the Legion d'Orient; and the 1st Battalion of the Cape Corps. The enumeration sounds miscellaneous, but these were all excellent units when fitted in. The total of the British force, adding these units, was 57,000 rifles, 12,000 sabres, and 540 guns.

On the other side were the VIIIth Turkish army (10,000 rifles and 157 guns), the VIIth Turkish army (7,000 rifles and 111 guns), the IVth Turkish army (6,000 rifles, 2,000 sabres, and 74 guns), a general enemy Reserve estimated at 3,000 rifles, and 30 guns; the garrison of Maan (2nd Turkish Army Corps) computed at 6,000 rifles and 30 guns; and at different points another 2,000 cavalry. The approximate total gave 32,000 rifles, 4,000 sabres, and 400 pieces of artillery, and the entire strength of all arms and services as 104,000 men. The Commander-in-Chief was General Liman von Sanders.

In General Allenby's judgment a longer interval for working up his force would have been advisable. If, however, operations were to be undertaken on a large scale they had to take place before the rains, which set in at the end of October. From the middle of September this allowed only six weeks. Last touches therefore had to be foregone.

The question was on what lines should the offensive be renewed, and the answer to a question of that kind is

<sup>1</sup> The French contingent was made up of a regiment of Algerian tirailleurs; two squadrons of Moroccan cavalry; two squadrons of Chasseurs d'Afrique; three batteries of field guns; five batteries of heavy guns; one company of engineers and other service units. To it were added three battalions of the Legion d'Orient (Armenians) and the 23rd Company of the same Corps (Syrians).

The Italian detachment was formed of companies of Carabinieri, Bersaglieri, and Cacciatori, a platoon of Mounted Carabinieri, a company of ex-prisoners of war, and other details.

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always shaped in part by the relative strength of the contending forces ; in part by the enemy's dispositions ; in part by experience already gained.

Though fewer in numbers, the hostile armies were in touch with each other. One result of the last phases of their reaction had been to give them command of the important crossing of Jordan at Jisr ed Damieh. They could move troops from the west of the river to the east or conversely. And experience had shown that so long as they could do that an attack east of Jordan could not be decisive.

Negatively, then, the balance of reasoning was in favour of an attack west of the river. But there was also a strong positive reason. To defeat the enemy on the west would sever this trans-Jordan link, and leave the IVth Turkish army isolated.

That settled, the next point was, Should the blow take place against the VIIth Turkish army in the centre, or against the VIIIth Turkish army on the coast ? It was a matter not difficult to decide and on two grounds. The country between Jerusalem and Nablus is rugged, and advance there must be fatiguing and slow ; secondly, a breach of the hostile front in the coastal zone would bring into play the most striking British superiority—that in mounted men.

It remained to apply that superiority, when brought into play, to the fullest extent.

Coming south from Damascus, the railway and the main road pass through Deraa, a great centre of routes. Near Deraa begins the valley of the Yarmuk, running west and joining the Jordan valley just south of the Sea of Galilee, and along the Yarmuk valley the railway line to the west had been carried. Also from Deraa there run west two main roads which, east of Jordan, converge. Jordan crossed, railway and road alike go south to Beisan ; then again west by north to El Fule. From Beisan and El Fule branched south the routes and tracks by which the VIIIth and VIIth Turkish armies were supplied.

It will be seen, therefore, that *so far as the Turkish*

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*forces west of Jordan were concerned*, the main line of communication ran not north and south but east and west, turning to the north at Deraa. Deraa formed an elbow. To strike at that elbow and put it out of joint would break the communication line. True, there was a road from Palestine to Damaseus passing to the west of the Sea of Galilee, but for military purposes it was quite secondary, and it, too, could be closed by the capture of Nazareth.

Now all the enemy forces west of Jordan were a long way south of El Fule and Beisan. They were fairly closely massed along the British front, a disposition in view of their effective strength necessary.

If, then, by a breach on the hostile right, the British cavalry could obtain a clear field along the coastal plain, they might cross the hills of Samaria, enter the plain of Esdraelon in which both El Fule and Beisan are situated and before the Turkish forces could retreat so far, seize both centres as well as Nazareth. At the same time, if the Arab forces east of Jordan could be directed upon Deraa, the exits would be barred.

So far as it was a question of doing the thing on the biggest and most sweeping lines, these were the lines.

It cannot be said that the enemy command had overlooked these risks—as possibilities. On the hostile right was the greatest mass of infantry strength, and in that coastal sector ever since March the Turks under German tuition had been laying out lines of fortification. There were two of these. One, a connected or linked series of positions extended on a sandy ridge from the foothills of the Palestine chine to the sea; another, 3,000 yards to the rear, ran across a marshy stretch, and barricaded the ways between the marshes. Fortified villages on the foothills finished off the scheme. So much for the right. On his left, east of Jordan, the enemy had deliberately maintained his strength. He was taking no chances as regarded Deraa. In short, his dispositions were designed to oppose the strongest resistance in his power to a blow against either wing. The first line of defences on the coastal plain was not only ten miles in



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length, but nearly two miles in depth, a maze of diggings covering twenty square miles.

In the preparation of the British scheme there were two concentrations it was advisable by every means to conceal; that against the coastal fortifications and that designed to attack the railway at Deraa. The latter was taking place at Kasr el Azrak, fifty miles east of Ammam and in a lonely part, and the Arabs of the Hedjaz were there joined by the British Light Armoured Car Brigade. Operations against Maan had been inactive for more than six months.

From Akaba to Deraa the direct road runs through Maan and Ammam. As that road was barred, there had to be a wide detour, and across tracts of desert where there was in one stretch a four days' ride from well to well, and in another a ride of two days. The Arab force therefore had set out from Akaba on August 31. The water found was not only scanty but bad, and so full of leeches that if not drunk with care they got into the men's mouths and fastened upon the inside of the nostrils.

It was essential that the British blow against the enemy's right on the coast should be delivered with a weight which would rupture the hostile front at the first impact, and to make sure of that result it was in General Allenby's judgment desirable to mass there five out of his seven infantry divisions and 383 guns, and to hold his two divisions of cavalry and one division of mounted infantry in readiness for the succeeding inroad. The first step was a transfer of the 60th Division from the right-centre to the extreme left of the line; the second a movement of the cavalry divisions to a rendezvous near Jaffa; and of the mounted infantry to another near Ludd. At both points there were groves affording concealment.

That left only two divisions of infantry, some unattached units, now grouped under the command of General Watson; one mounted division; and 157 guns for the remainder of the front. Were it to become observable a displacement of that magnitude would not



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only have enabled the enemy to penetrate the scheme, but must undoubtedly have led him to counter-attack. It had to be covered by a show of boldness, and the boldness took the form of activity in the Jordan valley by Major-General Sir Edward Chaytor, who was in command there. These demonstrations portended *in appearance* a renewed British move upon Ammam. Further, on the night preceding the main attack Lieut.-General Sir Philip Chetwode, in command north of Jerusalem of the 10th and 53rd Divisions, opened an assault on the hostile lines at El Mugheir east of the Nablus road with the object of pushing forward his right and closing the ways out to the lower Jordan. This fitted in with the Jordan valley demonstrations, and presumably it equally served to distract attention from the real point.

The operations on the coastal sector were under the command of Lieut.-General Sir Edward Bulfin, who had won distinction in France, alike for bravery and resource. He was now in command of the XXIst Corps, comprising the 3rd (Lahore); the 7th (Meerut); the 54th; and the 75th Divisions. The XXIst Corps was reinforced by the 60th Division; the French Detachment; 18 batteries of heavy and siege guns; the 5th Australian Light Horse Brigade, and two brigades of mountain artillery.

The troops moved towards the point of attack by marches at night, and were hidden by day in the orange groves round Ramleh, Ludd and Jaffa. To the Royal Air Force had been added an Australian Air Squadron, and increasingly the enemy's aircraft had been fought down. Hostile flights over the British lines were few.

It is General Allenby's opinion that his concentration passed undetected, and absence of any unusual counter-preparations on the enemy's part is the best proof. The enemy's reserves were not grouped for counter-attack, and a report giving his observations of the British dispositions on September 17—not more than thirty hours before the attack—recorded that no essential changes had taken place in the distribution of the British forces.

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Both the transfer of the 60th Division and the concentration of the cavalry towards the coast had eluded notice. To clinch the effect of surprise, the Headquarters of the VIIIth Turkish army at Tul Keram and those of the VIIth army at Nablus were in the early morning of September 19 bombed by the Allied airmen.

The infantry having already been deployed in their positions of attack, the guns fronting the coastal defences opened, at 4.30 a.m. on September 19, an intensive bombardment. It lasted fifteen minutes. Under cover of it the infantry went forward. The attack drove right home.

Left to right (from the coast inland) the order of battle was:—60th Division; 7th (Meerut) Division; 75th Division; 3rd (Lahore) Division;<sup>1</sup> the French Contingent; the 54th Division.

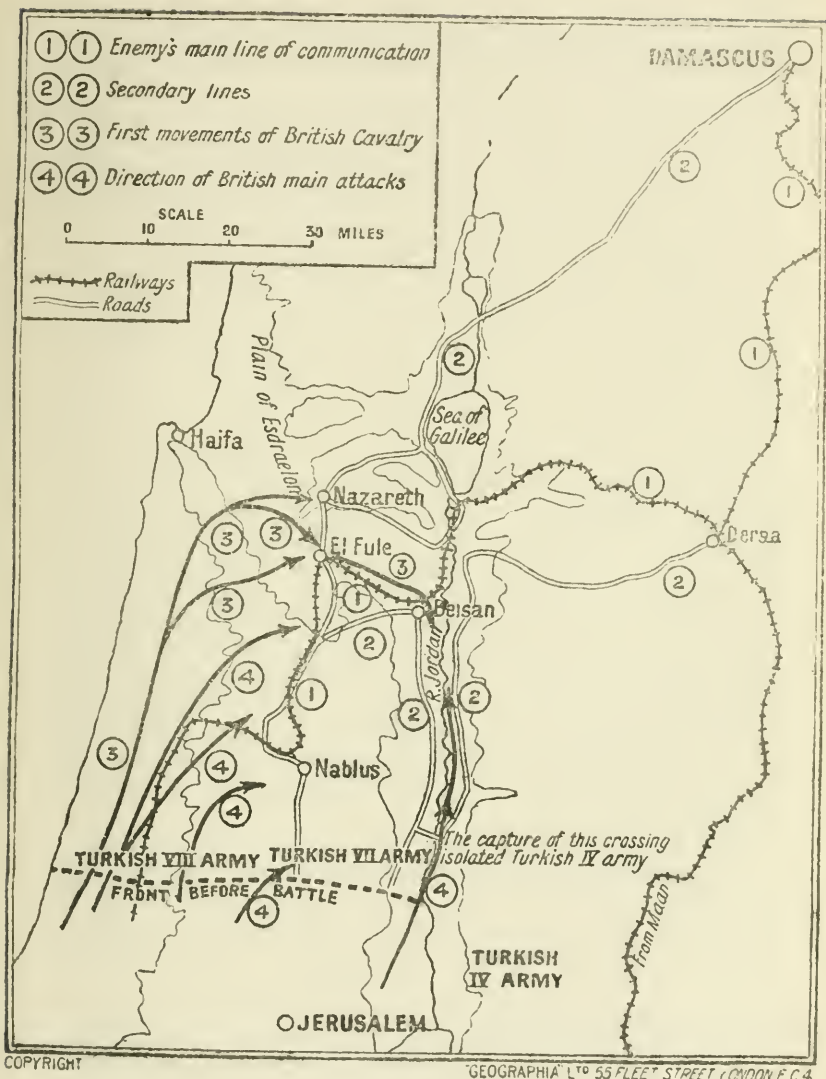
On the right of the line the French and Armenians and the 54th Division, fighting with great dash, attacked the fortified posts in the foothills and cleared them. On the plain the two Indian Divisions swept into and across the defences. Along the coast the 60th cleared the road and left it open for the cavalry. By the time the enemy, waking up to what was in the wind, had got his barrage down the assaulting troops were inside of it. The first line of defences crumpled up like match-board.

On the second line the 75th Division at El Tireh met with a stiff resistance, but the Meerut Division broke through on the left and another breach was made by the Lahore Division. The whole hostile second line then gave way like the first. Thereupon the front of the assault wheeled eastward, pushing the enemy into the

<sup>1</sup> Composition of the Lahore Division (Major-General Hoskins):—1st Connaught Rangers; 27th Punjabis; 91st Punjabis; 2/7th Gurkhas; 1st Manchesters; 47th Sikhs; 59th Scinde Rifles; 2/14th Baluchis; 2nd Dorsets; 93rd Indian Infantry; 105th Mahrattas; 1/1st Gurkhas.

Composition of the Meerut Division (Major-General Sir V. B. Vane):—1st Seaforth Highlanders; 28th Punjabis; 92nd Punjabis; 125th Napier's Rifles; 2nd Batt. Black Watch; 1st Guides Infantry; 20th Punjabis; 1/8th Gurkhas; 2nd Leicesters; 51st Sikhs; 53rd Sikhs; 56th Punjabis.

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hills, impeding his escape across the open country, and leaving the mounted men the necessary elbow room for rapid movement. In a few hours the VIIIth Turkish army had gone to wreck.

The first effects of the defeat were seen in a stampede towards Tul Keram; and next in a flight from that place towards Nablus. For a great part of the way the road from Tul Keram to Nablus follows a narrow valley, one of the rifts on the west side of the Palestine backbone. This valley was found by the airmen crowded with transport, which they bombed, barricading the road with wreckage. A regiment of the Australian Light Horse also, cutting across country, seized east of Tul Keram a hill overlooking the route, which then became impassable. A large haul of material and guns was thus secured.

The movement of the mounted troops may now be followed. They were the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions and the Australians, less the Light Horse Brigade, attached, as already noted, to the XXIst Corps for the purpose of covering its outer (or northern) flank during the eastward wheel. This admirable assembly of sabres was under the command of Lieut.-General Sir Harry Chauvel, a born leader of cavalry, dashing yet prudent, and resolute yet cool. The 4th and 5th Divisions, the leading formations of the Column, were, immediately before the opening of the attack, moved up by night and took up their positions in the orange groves round Sarona. In their rear the Australians were moving up from Ludd.

The Cavalry were behind the left (or coastal end) of the infantry line. So swift had been the progress of the attack that the Mounted Column was through both lines of the hostile defences early in the forenoon, and by mid-day eighteen miles north of the original front.

At its northern end the Palestine chine bends to the west, and ends on the coast in the lofty and precipitous ridge of Mount Carmel, which divides the coastal plain of Palestine from the Esdraelon plain to the north-east.

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There are passes over the hills, but it was important that the enemy should not be given the chance to occupy them, for on penetrating through the passes, the main drive had to take a large hairpin turn towards the south-east, following the route to El Fule and Beisan. To Abu Shushéh at the foot of the most practicable pass on the Esdraelon side of the hills, the ride from the starting point was fifty miles; from starting point to El Fule across the Esdraelon plain, sixty-five miles; to Beisan eighty miles. As the crow flies Nablus is distant from Beisan only twenty-five miles, and less than thirty-five by road. It was necessary, therefore, that the start should be a long one.

On reaching the Samaria hills, the Mounted Column divided. The 4th Division struck into the highlands up the valley of the Arah, the most direct route to El Fule. There is no road through this break adapted for anything on wheels, and only a rough mountain track, but it was practicable for cavalry. As it recedes into the hills the valley narrows, and at its head is a pass, 1,200 feet above sea level, with the little village of Musmus just below the summit. Being only some ten miles from El Fule, the pass was certain to be obstructed if opportunity was allowed, and as a fact the enemy, on hearing of the disaster to his VIIIth army, had hurried off a battalion for that purpose. The 4th Cavalry Division found the advanced parties of this force already on the evening of September 19 in possession. But short work was made of this opposition, and before the main body could come up the British cavalry were descending the ridge. The main body was encountered at El Lejjun. A charge of the 2nd Lancers disposed of them. Some 470 were taken prisoners. On reaching the open and level country the 4th Division rode for El Fule.

Coincidentally the 5th Division, moving through Jarak, had followed the pass to Abu Shushéh. They were not opposed. From Abu Shushéh the 13th Brigade was directed upon Nazareth; the 14th upon El Fule. And the 14th Brigade was the first to enter that place at



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half-past seven on the morning of September 20. Half an hour later the 4th Division arrived.<sup>1</sup>

At Nazareth was the enemy's General Headquarters. News of the defeat had come through about noon on September 19. Until midnight on that day the German commander had remained, partly clearing up, partly issuing his orders with a view of arresting the *débâcle*. But as hour after hour passed it had become more and more manifest that the disaster was final, and shortly after midnight Liman von Sandars had as unostentatiously as possible with some of his Staff slipped off towards Damascus in a motor car. At five in the morning the beat of hoofs, the boom of guns, and the fusillade of rifles and machine-guns announced that Nazareth was attacked. There was in the place a considerable garrison, some 3,000 men. The town was surrounded, and the British horsemen dashed in from all sides. The enemy fought in the streets and from the houses. This struggle, however, though sharp, was brief. Driven into the centre of the town and finding escape cut off, 2,000 surrendered. The hostile headquarters were occupied, and the Staff left behind taken. There had not been time to remove books, documents, or correspondence, and all were seized.

After this stroke the 13th Brigade also moved on to El Fule. From that place in the meanwhile the 4th Division had been sent on a dash to Beisan, and arrived at half-past four in the afternoon (September 20). They had covered the 80 miles in thirty-four hours. Among the captures at Beisan were three 15-centimetre howitzers. They were re-manned and turned upon the roads leading into the town from the south and east, roads along which the defeated hostile forces were now retreating.

From Beisan the 19th Lancers were detached to seize and hold the railway bridge across Jordan at Jisr Majamieh. Also in the meanwhile the Australians had been directed from El Fule south to Janin.

<sup>1</sup> The captures at El Fule included 10 locomotives, 50 trucks, and 3 aeroplanes. Twelve motor lorries which made a dash out of the town towards Beisan were chased and run down by the armoured cars.

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The effect of these moves was that the cavalry held, west of Jordan, all the points through which a Turkish retreat could take place, including the point at which the main line of communications passed the river.

But at the same time the British infantry forces had been pushing the enemy north-east and north on to those points.

Near Ajje the 5th Australian Light Horse had cut the railway between Tel Keram and El Fule. Off the route to El Fule the broken VIIIth army had been by the flanking impact pushed altogether. Thrown upon the roads from Nablus to Beisan, they were in the way of the VIIth army's retirement, and there must have been almost hopeless confusion even had the door at Beisan not been closed. The closing of the door of course made the confusion worse confounded. And the last touches were put upon the breakdown when the British infantry, following up, and crossing the Tul Keram-El Fule route, pressed relentlessly towards the Nablus-Beisan road. Notwithstanding the rough and mountainous character of the country, the difficulty of the tracks leading from the coastal plain to the highlands, and by no means least the scarcity of water, the 7th Division gallantly drove on, and on September 20 were at Beit Lud three miles east of Abreta. Into Beit Lud the enemy had thrown a strong flank guard, and it was clear that the place, which commanded a defile, was intended to be held at all costs. It was finally rushed by a charge of the 15th Seaforths. They met with rather severe casualties from machine-gun fire, but once they were in with bomb and bayonet the struggle was finished. By the afternoon of September 21 the division was on the Nablus road at Messudieh.

Moving also eastwards and directly upon Nablus, the 3rd Division found a flank guard holding and barring the way up the Wadi Azzun.

As soon as the disaster to the VIIIth army became known, the VIIth Army began its retirement. There was still the hope that it might get out. But late on September 19, and certainly on September 20, it was

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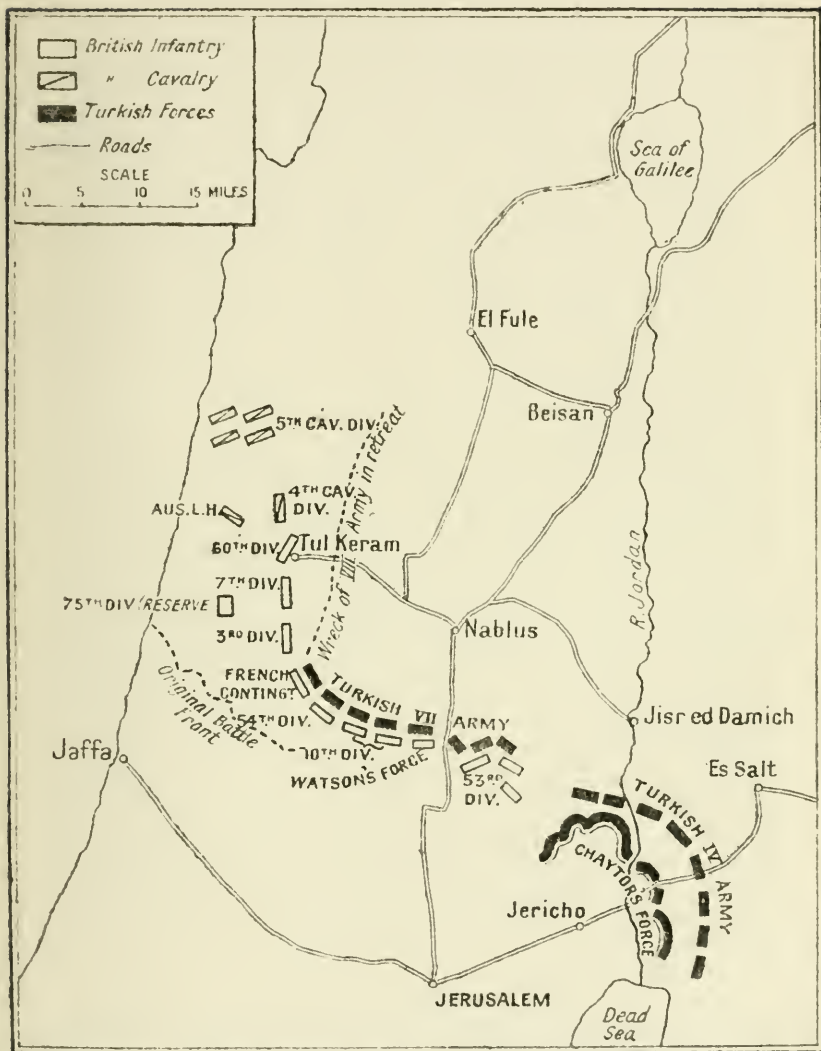
realised that the exits to the north had been closed. There was therefore but one possible chance for the VIIth Army left—that of getting across the Jordan valley at Shumet Nimrin, Umm es Shert, and Jisr ed Damieh.

To prevent that there were on the British side two moves. One was an attack by the troops of General Chetwode; the other a push up the Jordan valley by the force of General Chaytor. By now, of course, it had become patent that the weight of the British had been shifted to the coastal area, and that on their eastern wing they had been correspondingly thinned. Naturally, then, the enemy offered the stiffest of his resistance on that part of his line contiguous with the Jordan valley.

Astride the road to Nablus his defences were powerful. He had neglected nothing calculated to elaborate them, so much so that a frontal assault promised little. The plan, however, was not a frontal assault. It was to attack along the chine or backbone of the country west of the Nablus road, and following the spurs to the north-east to outflank and turn the defences. This operation was assigned to the 10th Division, and they had a hard task; a move over very rough and broken ground. On September 19 the enemy here was not in confusion. Later, when news of the disaster to the west filtered through to the rank and file *moral* gave way, but those effects were not manifest at the earliest until September 20 and meanwhile their German masters kept the Turks in hand. By then, working steadily forward, stiff as the opposition still was, the 10th Division had advanced seven miles. They were close upon Jemmanin and only six miles from Nablus. East of the Nablus road the 53rd Division had made headway both in the centre and on the right. But on the right, on the morning of September 20, they were counter-attacked strongly. It was the effort of the enemy to keep open the last possible door.

The pressure, however, went on, and on September 21 the heart of the VIIth Army failed and it too went

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completely to pieces. The whole rear was in confusion. Camps were being broken up, stores burned, dumps exploded, hospitals cleared. Amid this the retreating troops, their units broken and mixed, crowded the roads, mingling with the masses of transport. The routes from Nablus to Beisan were packed with this disordered traffic. It was the same along the road leading to the Jordan crossing at Jisr ed Damieh. As much as possible of the impedimenta and artillery was sent by this route. The road issues into the Jordan valley through a deep gorge, down which flows the river Fara. The gorge became a target for the Allied airmen, and wreckage and confusion sealed it up. Thereupon the flight was diverted along a by-road towards Beisan.

In numerous small parties enemy infantry was seen making its way along the various wadis in the hope of reaching the Jordan valley. But the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade, supported by the two West India Battalions, had been pushed up to Jisr ed Damieh and seized the crossing at that place, taking 517 prisoners.

What now occurred broadly was that the victorious forces were pressing in on every side. The infantry were driving from the south and south-west; the cavalry were moving down from the north; and all were collecting prisoners, equipment and material. Less the 75th Division, held in reserve, the troops of General Bulfin had advanced in three columns. The Lahore Division moved up the Wadi Azzun, striking for Nablus from the west; the Meerut Division on a route through Kefr Sur to cut the road north of Nablus; the 60th Division and the Australian Light Horse upon Messudie, the route to El Fule and Nazareth. Flank guards of the VIIth Army opposed the first two columns. The road north from Nablus was also crowded with the tide of retreat.

When the knowledge that there had not only been a defeat but that the army was trapped spread through the enemy ranks with the proverbial rapidity of bad tidings, confusion shaded into panic. In the course of September 21 the resistance lost all semblance of being



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organised. The rearguards no longer stood. It had become a mere business of sweeping up the fragments. Guns, transport, stores, small arms were left abandoned or littered along every road, and thrown into every gorge and gully. On one five mile stretch of road there were found abandoned 897 motor lorries and other vehicles, and 87 guns. Seventy-five thousand prisoners were taken, among them 3,500 Germans and Austrians, and 360 pieces of artillery. The captures of transport, baggage animals, locomotives and railway carriages and trucks were on a corresponding scale. As always in the operations against the Turks, this loss of guns and equipment was fatal and final. It took until September 23 to collect the parties of stragglers. The most serious attempts to break out were across the Jordan valley between Jisr ed Damieh and Jisr Mejamieh. One column of 3,000 men, which had partly got across at the latter point, was intercepted by the IIth Cavalry Brigade. Part of the Brigade attacked on the west bank, part, after swimming the river on horseback, on the east bank. All the column were captured, together with twenty-five machine-guns. The last belated enemy body was rounded up on September 24 in the El Maleh defile. Lock, stock and barrel, the VIIth and VIIIth Turkish armies had ceased to be.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ADVANCE TO DAMASCUS AND ALEPPO

Isolation, retreat and pursuit of the IVth Turkish Army—Arab enterprises against Deraa—Capture of Ammam—Battle at Sheik Saad—Arabs take Deraa—Surrender of the Turkish 2nd Army Corps at Leban—Capture of Haifa—Gallantry of the Jodhpur Lancers—The cavalry drive to Damascus—Three lines of advance—Hostile resistance at Katana—Capture of Kiswe—Collapse of Turkish authority at Damascus—Feeling between Germans and Turks—German-Turkish combat—Scenes in the city—Flight of the Turkish Governor—Australians capture the last of the garrison—Entry of the Allied forces—Sweeping character of the Turkish reverse—Occupation of Beyrout and advance to Homs and Aleppo—Muslimie junction taken—Review of the Campaign.

ONE Turkish army, the IVth, now alone remained afoot in Syria to the south of Damascus. Until September 22 the IVth Army had held on east of the Jordan valley, but the defeat of its detachment at the Jisr ed Damieh crossing, and the severance of this link, had left its position both useless and precarious. By September 22 the defeat of the VIIth Army must have been seen to be past retrieval. Therefore on the morning of September 23 the IVth Army too was on the move. Chaytor's force, with the Australian and New Zealand Division, followed up, and the Allied airmen flew on ahead. The retreat was rapid, for in the afternoon of September 23 Es Salt had been reached and passed. The New Zealanders, after a fight with a rearguard in which they took some 400 prisoners and three guns, entered Es Salt at half-past six in the evening. The enemy then fell back upon Ammam. From that position on September 25 he was ousted in turn. It had

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probably been the intention to hold there until the 2nd Turkish Army Corps, which had also set out on September 23, could move north from Maan, but the pursuit was too fast. The IVth Army therefore, leaving the 2nd Corps to shift for itself, began its march upon Damascus, part along the railway, part along the Pilgrim road. The Australians and New Zealanders and the airmen still pursued. As the miles lengthened the retreating mass melted away. Five thousand prisoners and 28 guns fell into the hands of the pursuing horsemen.

Probably it was not yet known to the retiring force that the route to Damascus by way of Deraa had already been cut, but that was the case. The Arabs from Kasr el Asrak had advanced towards Deraa early in September, joined *en route* by musters of several tribes, for the desert was now "up." The railway was raided to begin with south of Deraa, where the demolishers broke down a bridge and lifted a section of the track. They next, the zest of the proceedings added to by skirmishes with the Deraa garrison, extended their removal activities to the line north of the town, and the branch line to Palestine on the west. The station at Mezerib was taken and burned; two trains destroyed; and the water tanks blown up. News of the raid had been telegraphed to Damascus and a squadron of German planes were sent out to bomb the assailants off. The Arabs met this air attack in a characteristic fashion. They spread themselves out, and each man sat quite still beside his camel. But knowing that the attack would be renewed, they adopted a yet more subtle ruse. Withdrawing into the stony wadis of the region, they lay down on the shady side of their crouching "mounts," and from the air could not be distinguished from the surrounding rocks. The enemy planes re-appeared, hovered about, and saw nothing, for though they flew low they dropped no bombs. By the attack upon Mezerib, traffic to and from Palestine was cut off. The Arab regulars and their adherents then lay in wait for the remains of the IVth Turkish Army, taking up at Sheik Saad, north of Deraa, a position across both the

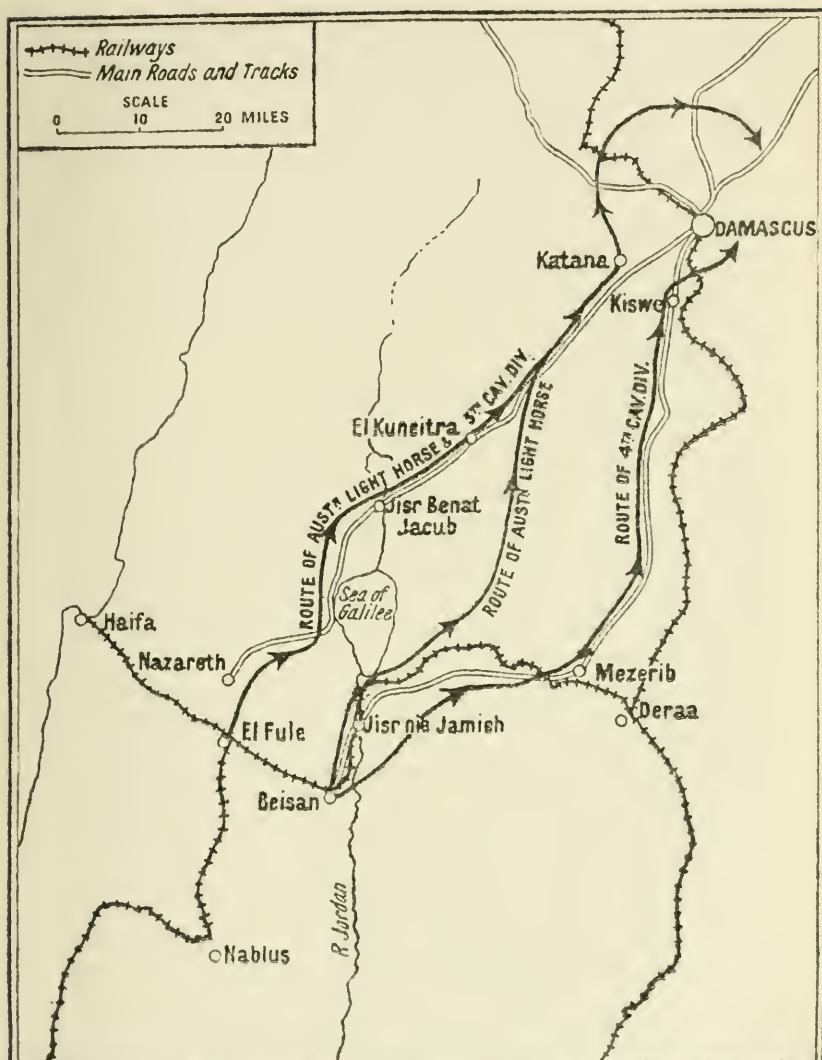
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road and railway. The action which ensued resolved itself into a running fight lasting two days. Though footsore and dusty, the Turks and Germans fought desperately. They were cornered. At the finish, seeing the foe visibly worn down, the Arab army charged forward and scattered the retreating force to the winds. Many surrendered, among them thirty German and Austrian officers. The IVth Army, too, was at an end. No opposition being in the way, the Arabs marched south, and on September 27 drove the last Turks out of Deraa.

The Turkish garrison at Maan, on evacuating that place, had moved north at its best speed. But coincidently Chaytor's Force had marched south from Ammam and had met the head of the retreating Turkish column at Leban (September 28). A demand for surrender was dropped from an aeroplane. To this the Turkish general, Ali Bey Wahabi, sent no answer. Finding, however, that evasion was not possible, he next day capitulated. The prisoners numbered 4,000, besides 500 sick, who were being brought along in three trains. Hesitation on the part of the Turkish General, it was learned, had arisen from fear of the Arab irregulars, who had all along been hovering on the flanks of the retreat. There was a dread that if the Turks parted with their arms they would be massacred. To reassure the Turks, the British troops formed a cordon within which the prisoners, by detachments, piled their arms. This was the last enemy force of any account in Southern Syria. In all, Chaytor's men had taken 10,000 prisoners, 57 guns, and 132 machine-guns, besides an important haul of rolling stock.

The next broad phase of the operations was the advance upon Damascus. A needful preliminary was the clearance of the enemy from the coast and the capture of Haifa. The port would afford a better and nearer base for oversea supplies, for on the existing communications through Rafa and Jaffa a rapid move upon Damascus in any strength could not be made. Because of that the enemy hung on to the place, not in

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the hope of retention, but to cause delay. The surplus of the Haifa garrison had been sent to join in the general retreat, and had got across the country as far as Tiberias on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. There, however, it had been rounded up by the 13th Cavalry Brigade. The action took place at night and by moonlight, and in the moonlight the 18th Lancers charged and rode through the hostile line. More than 300 of the surviving enemy were taken. Enough men, however, were left at Haifa to, it was thought, hold the town while economising stores. There was every intention to stand a siege. The approaches were barricaded, and commanded by machine-gun emplacements, and batteries were placed in position.

Haifa, where there was a German colony, lies under the slopes of Mount Carmel, and in a bay facing north. Along the northern foot of the mountain flows a considerable river, the Rishon, which, entering the bay on the south-east side, leaves between the heights and the sea a triangle of land, part of which the town covers. It was therefore by no means an easy position to attack, for the ground at the mouth of the river is marshy, and the space between the stream and the mountain along which the road runs narrow.

When reconnaissance had left it beyond doubt that the enemy here meant to fight, the 5th Cavalry Division was sent from El Fule. Part of the Division, the Mysore and Jodhpur Lancers, moved upon Haifa; part (the 13th Brigade) upon Acre. The Mysore Lancers rode along the summit of the range, intending to take the defences there in reverse. But while they were thus engaged the Jodhpur Lancers dashed through the gap between the river and the heights, rode over the enemy's machine-guns, spearing the teams, and mastered the place. It was a remarkable feat, which owed its success to its daring. The horsemen appeared and were through in a flash, hesitating not a second, and their lances were at close quarters irresistible. Regrettably their gallant commander, Colonel Rhakur Dalpat Singh, who was at the head of the charge, was one of those who fell.

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The losses, however, were otherwise not heavy. The remainder of the garrison, 1,350 men, surrendered, and seventeen guns were taken, though evidently Haifa had been intended to prove a hard nut. Acre was seized without a defence. On the approach of the cavalry the garrison, a company, took the road along the coast to the north, but were surrounded.

The way for the great drive was now clear. The 4th Cavalry Division, which had been hunting out fugitives, was assembled at Beisan; the Australians at Tiberias; the 5th recalled to Nazareth. On September 26 the 4th Division, which was to lead, set out. They were to move through Deraa, and along the Damascus railway, the Australians by the road west of the Sea of Galilee, and through Safed, and El Kuneitra; the 5th Division was to follow as soon as fit.

The chief resistance was encountered by the Australians. Theirs was the shorter, but at the same time the more difficult route, and the enemy had taken care to the best of his ability to obstruct it. The first point at which a hostile rearguard put up a fight was at the crossing of the Upper Jordan. The route here at Jisr Benat Jacub is carried over the river by a bridge, and the bridge had been broken down, but part of the Australian column passed the river below the bridge and forced a withdrawal. The next brush occurred at El Kuneitra. The road there traverses a plateau open and grassy, but undulating, and studded with huge boulders. That kind of country lent itself to sniping. Sniping accordingly was the tactic. Circassian irregulars, inhabitants of the plateau, took a hand in the game, possibly enough for the excitement of being in it. Yet another enemy detachment was encountered at Sasa. It was a flash in the pan opposition, however, and the column rode on to Katana, twelve miles southwest of Damascus. There the resistance was a more serious affair, and the Australians found they could not get past it.

But meanwhile, having joined up with the Arabs, the 4th Cavalry Division had reached Kiswe, about the

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same distance south of Damascus, and the 5th Cavalry Division following the Australians, had pushed north, and arrived at Sahnaya, nearly midway between Kiswe and Katana. They rounded up at that point an enemy column, 1,500 strong, pushed west from Kiswe by the 4th Division. Encountered by the 13th Cavalry Brigade, this column tried to scatter to right and left. Of the total, however, two-thirds were captured. Just before this the 13th Cavalry Brigade had taken the Jebel el Aswad station. In Kiswe another 675 prisoners and 4 guns were added to the haul.

With the enemy's loss of Kiswe the opposition at Katana also gave way. It was now clear that any hope of obstructing the main roads of Damascus until a rally could take place rested on no foundation. Not merely were the retreating and broken Turkish forces pressed by British horsemen and by the Arabs; the Turkish administration in Damascus had been stricken with paralysis. News of the military crash in Palestine had thrown the city into tense excitement. On the heels of it came word that the British were pushing north. And these reports were speedily confirmed by the attitude towards one another of Germans and Turks. Between them, at all events in Syria, there had never been any heartiness. Jemel Pasha was known to hold the German influence in contempt, and his subordinates copied his example. In a letter addressed to Count Bernsdorff in November, 1917, after the reverses at Beersheba and Gaza, Major von Papen had described the VIIIth Turkish army as "bolting from every cavalry patrol."<sup>1</sup> In his opinion, the Turkish leadership was incapable.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This letter, which was among the documents taken at the Yilderim Headquarters in Nazareth, ran :—

"We have had a very bad time.

"The breakdown of the army, after having had to relinquish the good positions in which it had remained for so long, is so complete that I could never have dreamed of such a thing. But for this complete dissolution, we should still be able to make a stand south of Jerusalem, even to-day. But now the VIIIth Army bolts from every cavalry patrol.

"Many reasons have contributed to this sorrowful result, chiefly incapacity on the part of the troops and their leaders. Single men

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On the other hand, Turkish feeling was reflected in a letter from Fevzi Pasha to von Falkenhayn. Acknowledging his nomination to the command of the VIIth Army, Fevzi intimated that he would not be able to take with him the officers and men in German uniform who had hitherto been on his staff. The reason he gave was that the employment of Germans in the neighbourhood of the Hedjaz railway, regarded by Moslems as sacred, would favour British propaganda, and add to the already treasonable fanaticism of the inhabitants, and he wound up with a "request" that the German flying units and motor lorry columns in that zone should either be replaced by Turks, or put into Turkish uniforms.

Clearly enough, these excuses were specious, and the letter, though couched in polite language, was an insult. Fevzi, however, was a capable man, and if on the part of von Falkenhayn there was resentment it had to be held over. The truth is that German control was still with the Turkish army a sore point, and the Germans had to handle the army with care. As to comparative German and Turkish capacity, the manner in which Fevzi had in the *débâcle* commanded the VIIth Army certainly compared more than favourably with von Krassenstein's command of the VIIIth. Responsibility for the smash, in truth, lay with the Yilderim group. It was they who had been caught out, and they who had failed to foresee that the crossings of Jordan might be cut. During the reaction in the earlier part of the year the Germans had taken to all intents entire control of communications. Many more German officials had then been sent to Damascus, and, Turkish feeling not-

fight very pluckily, but the good officers have fallen and the remainder have bolted; in Jerusalem alone, we arrested 200 officers and 5,000-6,000 men deserters.

"Naturally Enver presses very strongly to hold on to Jerusalem with all possible means, on account of the political effect. From a military point of view it is a mistake, for this shattered army can only be put together again if entirely removed from contact with the enemy and fitted out with new divisions. This, however, can only take place after the lapse of months.

"Now it is just a toss-up."—*Official Records of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.*



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withstanding, Germans had been spread along the railway. It was not only Jemel Pasha who was an obstructionist, taking the German view of matters. With the commanders of both the VIIth and the IVth Armies Liman von Sanders, when he replaced von Falkenhayn, shortly after the latter had lost the battle at Tel el Ful, had repeated differences. The disesteem was mutual.

And during the last days of Turkish rule in Damascus there was no longer on either side any pains to conceal the dislike. Turks blamed Germans and Germans Turks. When at last it came to getting away as fast as possible, the Germans in the scramble for vehicles commandeered nearly all. After the capture of Katana, the 15th Australian Light Horse and the French saphis and chasseurs under Commander Labon had swooped to the north-west, and, taking possession of a defile through which ran the railway and the main road from Damascus to Beyrout, had blockaded both. They wrecked several trains trying to get through with troops, and in that way added yet another 4,000 to the total of prisoners. The railway cut, and the road to Beyrout obstructed, there was no way out of Damascus except to north and north-east, and those last exits, it was certain, would not be open long. In the circumstances, the attempt of the Germans to monopolise everything on wheels aroused Turkish ire. The Turks dragged their late patrons out of carts and carriages without ceremony. This led to a fight in which both sides used firearms, and a number on both sides were killed.

In the meantime, by a common and spontaneous movement the Damascus public had set Turco-German authority aside altogether. Sheerifean flags were hung out before the houses. There was a universal boycott of Turks and Germans alike. Neither could buy provisions at any price. A Turkish garrison was still in the city, and in ordinary circumstances would at once have been turned out to put down the revolt without mercy. But outside from the south came the rolling boom of the cannon, and the sound was always drawing



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nearer. The Turkish garrison did nothing. So thorough was the demoralisation that the Turkish staffs forsook the hospitals, leaving the dead lying about on the floors where they had been deposited in the moment of flight. Jemel Pasha left on the evening of September 30 by the north-eastern road, and only got away in the nick of time. When he had gone the Turkish troops in the city, seeing no reason why they should remain, followed his example. But they, it happened, were too late. In the interval the Australians had been busy hunting down those of the enemy who had got out before the northern exits could be closed. On the road to the north-east they fell in with this column of Turks, 2,500 strong, and hung on to it. For seventeen miles the fight was kept up. Then 1,500 of the column laid down their arms. The remainder dispersed in all directions.

At six in the morning of October 1 the Allied forces came in, the 10th Australian Light Horse from the north, the Hedjaz Arabs from the south. The population filled the streets and welcomed them with enthusiasm. Such Germans and Turks as still remained in the city were hunted up and placed under guard. A Native Government was established, and as it had the entire support and confidence of the inhabitants, and was able to maintain order, the Allied military occupation was not prolonged.

It will by reference to the dates be seen that on September 26, when the drive to Damascus began, the IVth Turkish Army and the garrison of Maan were still afoot. There was the possibility, though it was perhaps not much more, that they might re-unite with the enemy forces at Damascus. The latter were not inconsiderable, and together the enemy might, in General Allenby's estimation, have found himself with a force of all ranks mustering 45,000 men. Rapidity of manœuvre alone could check that development. But after the moves across Jordan and in face of their results the concentration ceased to be possible, and gave the opening for a blow at the Damascus garrison disconcerting in its swiftness. Of the enemy force in Syria, representing in

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the middle of September a ration strength of probably 150,000, if not more, 17,000 only got away, and they were entirely without either equipment or material of war. There has rarely been a more sweeping reverse.

In view of the completeness of the victory General Allenby had determined to occupy Beyrout, the port of Damascus. He would thus again have an improved and shortened line of communications. The Meerut Division which had been moved to Haifa, marched from that place north along the coast, passing through Tyre and Sidon, and reached Beyrout on October 8. The inhabitants had already made prisoners of the Turks in the town. Beyrout occupied, the next move was upon Homs and Tripoli. There was no resistance. The concluding project was the capture of Aleppo, though nearly 200 miles north of Damascus. For that project the sole British forces now available were the 5th Cavalry Division and the Armoured Car Brigade, but a detachment of the Arab army took part in the enterprise. The Armoured Cars went forward in advance, but five miles south of Aleppo were held up by the enemy's rearguard. They were joined on October 25 by the cavalry and the Arabs, and that night the Arabs attacked and took the town by storm. The enemy retired west upon Katma, the cars and cavalry in pursuit. South-east of Haritan the last action of the campaign—a combat with the Turkish rearguard—was fought. The cavalry cut the road to Katma, and seized the junction at Muslimie where the railways from Syria and Mesopotamia converge. In one sense the operations were incomplete, for it was the intention to take Alexandretta, the port of Aleppo, and the Australian Mounted Division was on its way from Damascus for that purpose when the armistice with the Turkish Government was concluded.

In little more than a month all Syria north of Jerusalem had been conquered. It was one of the most notable feats of arms on record.

Summarising the results of the battle, General Allenby divided it into five phases. (I) The manœuvre, which,

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breaching the enemy's front on the right, enabled the British cavalry to reach and hold the junction points on the hostile line of communications, and to bar the retreat. (II) The rounding up of the VIIth and VIIIth Turkish armies. (III) The operations east of Jordan, and the interception of garrison of Maan. (IV) The drive to Damascus, the break up of the IVth Turkish army, and the advance along the coast to Beyrout. (V) The advance to Homs and Aleppo.

The campaign had been singularly brilliant, and a remarkable example of intellectual courage. Physical courage is thrown away without its intellectual complement. That an able general is himself worth an army is a truth the Great War has only the more forcibly illustrated. Weighing in the leadership, the British superiority in Syria was overwhelming. And yet it was undoubtedly one of those cases where, but for the leadership, the enterprise might have been a stalemate, vastly more costly in life. There are some public services it is impossible adequately to measure.

## CHAPTER X

### THE LAST PHASE IN THE BALKANS

Manœuvres of retreat—Why popularly misunderstood—Influence of military *moral*—Value of the Serbian Army—Effect on the Balkan Campaign—The new factors—The Allied front—Defences of the British sector—The re-organised Greek forces—Changes in the Allied commands—The causes behind them—The Serbian plan—Its final adoption—Bulgarian moral—Preliminary Allied ruses—Opening of the main attack in September, 1918—The Serbian success—Purpose of the British attack—The strategical results—Bulgarians' disastrous retreat—Separation and destruction of the three Bulgarian armies—Capitulation of Bulgaria.

THE Turkish overthrow in Syria was the first of the great disasters which were now to overtake the Germanic Confederation in the East ; the Bulgarian overthrow in the Balkans was the second.

Many as were the dramatic episodes of the Great War, it may be questioned if any have a higher interest than the close of the Balkan campaign. Substantially it was the epic of the Serbians, who having suffered the extreme of oppression, and adversities which had apparently for ever crushed them in the dust, by a stroke of valour as brilliant as it was decisive regained both their country and their freedom. Ever since, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Serbians had freed themselves from the Turks, they had been an irritant to the Government at Vienna. Austria embodied a military despotism. Yet here at its very door was a successful assertion of that principle of nationality it was a main purpose of the Austrian system to subordinate, if not to suppress. That the example of Serbia

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helped to inspire the revolt of Hungary in 1848-9 can hardly be doubted. Serbia was charged at Vienna with keeping up a propaganda among the Slavs subjected to Austrian rule. There is no evidence that this propaganda was ever directly or officially inspired from Belgrade, and there is no evidence because no such inspiration was necessary. The existence of an independent Serbia was enough. It would be going too far to say that the chronic ferment in Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina was not regarded at Belgrade with a friendly eye. It undoubtedly was, and the aspirations of the Serbians towards political reunion are explicable enough. But to Austria they meant disintegration. Serbia, too, barred the way to the south-east. If Serbia could have been reduced to political dependence upon Austria it would have been a different matter. Serbia, however, could not. The gravamen of Austrian dissatisfaction was Serbia's *independence*. In the circumstances, the relationship between Serbia and Austria could not but be one of mutual distrust. When the Central Powers had completed their preparations for war, this friction in South-eastern Europe, forced into flame by German intrigue, offered the ready pretext for hostilities.

One of the features of the war, taking it as a whole, which the popular judgment of the hour least understood, were the military manœuvres of retreat. On the Allied side there were four important movements of that character :—the retirement from Mons ; the retreat of the Russian armies in 1915 ; the retreat of the Serbian army at the end of that year ; and the falling back of the Italians from the Isonzo. If we add the retirement of General Townshend upon Kut after the battle of Ctesiphon, we have a fifth. All have this feature in common : they were remarkable examples of military skill and masterpieces of leadership. Nor was the retirement of the Rumanians upon the Sereth lacking in ability. Every one of these movements had in the long run a notable influence on the fortunes and issue of the conflict. For a sound judgment on movements of that kind, however, time is needed. Never, perhaps, was



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a conclusion more amply vindicated by the sequel than that which held the Serbian retreat at the close of 1915 to have been a feat of arms unsurpassed. The Serbian army was not alone outnumbered. It had expended its munitions, carefully husbanded though they had been. It was assailed by the Austrians and Germans in front, and by the Bulgarians in flank. It ought to have been destroyed.

In like circumstances in Italy the Austrians, and in France the Germans, had had no alternative save surrender, or its equivalent. But between the armies of Austria and Germany and those of the Allies, and in no instance more conspicuously than in that of the Serbian army, there was a fundamental difference. The armies of the Central Powers were built up on a mechanical basis. Mechanism was their main motive power. It was the foundation alike of the German and Austrian despotisms. But in the armies of the Allies mechanism was secondary to *moral*. When the mechanism of the forces of Germany and Austria had been broken they were finished. In the case of the Allied armies such dislocation was temporary, not fatal. Stripped though they were of the mechanical means of resistance, the Serbians still remained in spirit and in discipline an army, and their re-equipment at Corfu during 1916 produced a body of veteran troops, who for their numbers had no superiors, and rarely anywhere at any time have had equals. They were skilful; they were hardy; they were in the mass phenomenally agile; they could exist and keep fit on frugal and even scanty fare; they despised hardships; they were fighting men to the manner born; they were burning with zeal, and with wrath for their country's wrongs. True, there were not more than 70,000 of them, but 70,000 troops of that quality is a force of enormous power. They were fitted out now with every aid which science could place at their disposal, and it is literally exact to say that they could go anywhere and do anything.

Now manifestly, little as it was apprehended at the time, this was a factor which altered the outlook in the

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Balkan campaign fundamentally. Previously to this the campaign had been a struggle of the Serbians, not merely against heavy odds, but a struggle carried on under almost every disadvantage. It had been a relatively feeble, mistimed, and certainly an inadequate effort on the part of the greater Allies. It had been overshadowed by the intrigues of Constantine at Athens, and his working alliance with Germany. At the end of 1916, however, Constantine had at length been uprooted. The Greek army came into play. Rescued from the wretched state into which it had been deliberately suffered to relapse, and, when re-organised, a first-class force, the Greek army, with the political support of Greece, represented a second factor which profoundly modified the position.

Superficially, after the first effect of the Serbian re-equipment had made itself felt in the capture of Monastir, and had paved the way for a firm-handed treatment of Constantine and his entourage, the line of front in the Balkans appeared again to become fixed. And those who judged by surface appearances, failing to appreciate either the Serbian or the Greek factor at its true value, and much more the combined effect, did not hesitate to affirm that the Balkan campaign was for the Allies a waste of resources. Possibly enough, in the face of this opinion, insistently expressed, and had it not been for the patent necessity of retaining Salonica as a safeguard of communications in the Eastern Mediterranean, the troops of the greater Allies might have been withdrawn and the States of the Western Balkans left to shift for themselves. It would have been an irreparable military error.

For though the Bulgarians' fortification of their front was elaborate, and had been a work of extraordinary labour—the hewing of trenches and dug-outs out of the bare and solid rock across many miles of rugged country—though they were well supported by German and Austrian artillery, and lavishly provided with machine-guns, and though, finally, the collapse of Russia, relieving them from pressure in the north, seemed to have made

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their position doubly secure, and the hope of breaking it remote, there was happily at the French headquarters in the West an estimation of the outlook and of its realities with a soldierly eye. From the opinion that the Balkan campaign was of the first importance neither Joffre nor Foch ever deviated. They were aware that when the time came a decisive stroke could there be delivered.

Of the Allied line the British troops under the command of General Milne held the sector from the Struma to the Vardar, approximately 100 miles in extent. The Serbians held the difficult and hilly country from the Vardar to Lake Ostrovo. With his French forces, and a Corps of Russians, who later proved unreliable and had to be withdrawn, General Sarrail occupied the line north of Monastir and to Lake Presba, his left covered by the Italians based upon Valona. The main military strength of this composite Allied army were the Serbians.

Opposed to them the British had the Bulgarian army of the Struma, and the Bulgarian army of the Vardar, and behind the latter were the gross of the Bulgarian reserves. The third Bulgarian army, with a contingent of German troops, faced the French.

This was the state of affairs at the end of 1917. On the dispositions of General Sarrail the British sector was the defensive wing. His consistent plan had been to move forward on his left—north of Monastir—and turn the enemy line in that quarter. The plan had not been achieved, but the steps so far taken—the capture of Kamakchalan, and the advance to Monastir—had been part of it, and those steps had had the effect of cutting off Bulgarian access to Greece. So far, then, though the work was incomplete, it had not been wasted.

The British sector was important because it covered Salonica, and as was evident enough from the disposal of their forces the Bulgarian objective politically was the capture of that place. The British sector was not easy to hold. It was not only long, but on an average sixty miles from Salonica. Strung out over such an extent of country, and at such a distance from the

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centre of supply, the limited force at the command of General Milne may appear but a fragile barrier to oppose to two hostile armies outnumbering them by at least four to one. The wonder, indeed, is that the barrier was effective. But the British divisions had given the Bulgarians a taste of their fighting quality and had imposed respect.

The approaches to Salonica from inland were down the Vardar valley, and through the Rupel pass, the gorge cut in the mountains by the Struma. To blockade those inlets was, for the defence, the chief concern, for the enemy held the Rupel pass. As time went on the British defences were strengthened on a system tending to economise forces, a necessity of the situation. The previously roadless area between Salonica and the front was provided with well-paved causeways, radiating from the city. One ran to Neohori at the mouth of the Struma, another to Seres, others to Snevee and Rajanova; a fifth to Lake Doiran, and a sixth to Karasuli on the Vardar. The making and paving of these highways had provided work and wages for the Salonica population, whose ordinary means of subsistence by the trade of the port had been cut off. The radiating roads, too, were linked up by lateral communications, and at the same time light railways were laid down. In this work the Royal Engineers, under the direction of Major-General H. A. A. Livingstone, engineer-in-chief, rendered service beyond estimate. Further, in the autumn of 1917 a second line of defences was begun along positions from five to fifteen miles behind the first line, and a third and inner line immediately covering Salonica was being established.

Nor can these precautions be considered superfluous. Never fully adequate for its task, the British force had been reduced by the withdrawal of two divisions of infantry and two brigades of cavalry, leaving four infantry divisions—the 22nd (Major-General Duncan), the 26th (Major-General Gay), the 27th (Major-General Forrestier-Walker), and the 28th (Major-General Croker). But these were divisions enfeebled by malaria, and when,



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in accordance with a decision of the British War Cabinet, their infantry strength was cut down to ten battalions apiece, it is an outside computation to put their fit effective total at 20,000 bayonets. Fortunately, early in 1918 the Greek factor began to make itself felt in the field. The hard-worked force of General Milne was in March, 1918, stiffened by a division of the 1st Greek Army Corps, increased later by the two remaining divisions, and that Corps, under the command of General Paraskevopoulos, was able to take over the lines in the Struma valley. Later still, General Milne had placed under his orders two divisions of the Greek Corps of National Defence, as well as a regiment of Greek cavalry, and some batteries of the Hellenic heavy artillery. He had then under his command four British and five Greek Divisions.

At the end of 1917 General Sarraill was recalled, and his place as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces taken by General Guillaumat, who had rendered distinguished services in Gallipoli, and was later to gain still greater distinction in France. The activities of Guillaumat were in the main preparatory. He occupied himself most conspicuously with a stiffening of the Allied defences, the inner line round Salonica among others. According to reports, received by way of Western Europe, a Bulgarian offensive was probable. On the spot therefore it was desirable to disturb these supposed hostile preparations and plans, and gather all the reliable information possible as to intentions. With that view in April, 1918, a series of raids was undertaken. An operation in the Struma valley was on a considerable scale—offensive movement by three divisions, two British, one Greek. These troops seized eight villages previously held by the Bulgarians. In the fighting, which at times was hand to hand and severe, the enemy incurred heavy losses. The object of ascertaining his strength in this quarter was fully attained. In view of a presumed enemy thrust down the valley of the Vardar, it was, of course, essential to know precisely what he was capable of by way of the Rupel pass and the Struma



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valley. And, besides, the show of Allied strength here was if anything a deterrent. The coincident raids about Lake Doiran were on a smaller scale. The broken country there admitted of nothing more.<sup>1</sup> In these activities the British airmen—that arm was now respectably represented—took a prominent part. At very brief intervals, sometimes day by day, they bombed the Bulgarian camps, dumps, and railway stations. Hostile air squadrons opposed them, but it is well within the truth to say that they more than held their own.

Taking the Bulgarian standpoint, the raiding, combined with the strengthening of the Allied defences, and more especially those immediately round Salonica, would indicate nervousness, and that impression was likely to be reinforced by the fact that in the Struma valley one after another of the villages which had been occupied was after an interval evacuated, and that finally the British and Greeks fell back upon their former line.

Now what was the real meaning of all this? No doubt the rumour of an intended offensive in the Balkans had been given out from Berlin, but if the matter be weighed it will be seen that after the Austro-German check upon the Piave at the end of 1917 such a Balkan offensive was to the last degree improbable. Operations in Italy and in the Balkans were closely interrelated.

<sup>1</sup> One raid, novel in its plan and bold in its execution, is worthy of special notice. Shortly after midnight on the 15th-16th April, in bright moonlight, a mixed naval and military party left the shore of the lake by Doiran Station in four boats, silently driven by electric motors, which had been brought up from Salonica and assembled under the eyes of the enemy. From Doiran Station to Doiran Town by water is two miles, but the party landed well within the enemy lines unchallenged. Sentries were left to guard the boats, the town was searched and the lakeside road patrolled. Not a Bulgar was seen, and so, as the main purpose of the raid, the capture of prisoners, could not be achieved, the party embarked, re-crossed the lake in safety and apparently unobserved, and landed again on our shore at four o'clock. This daring operation stands out as a striking testimony to the enterprise of the troops, and its skilful execution was undoubtedly due to the energy and care displayed by Captain R. S. Olivier, R.N., Senior Naval Officer at Salonica, and the officers and men of H.M.S. *St. George*, who not only trained the detachment on this occasion, but have at all times cordially assisted the Army.—*Dispatch of General Milne, December 1, 1918.*

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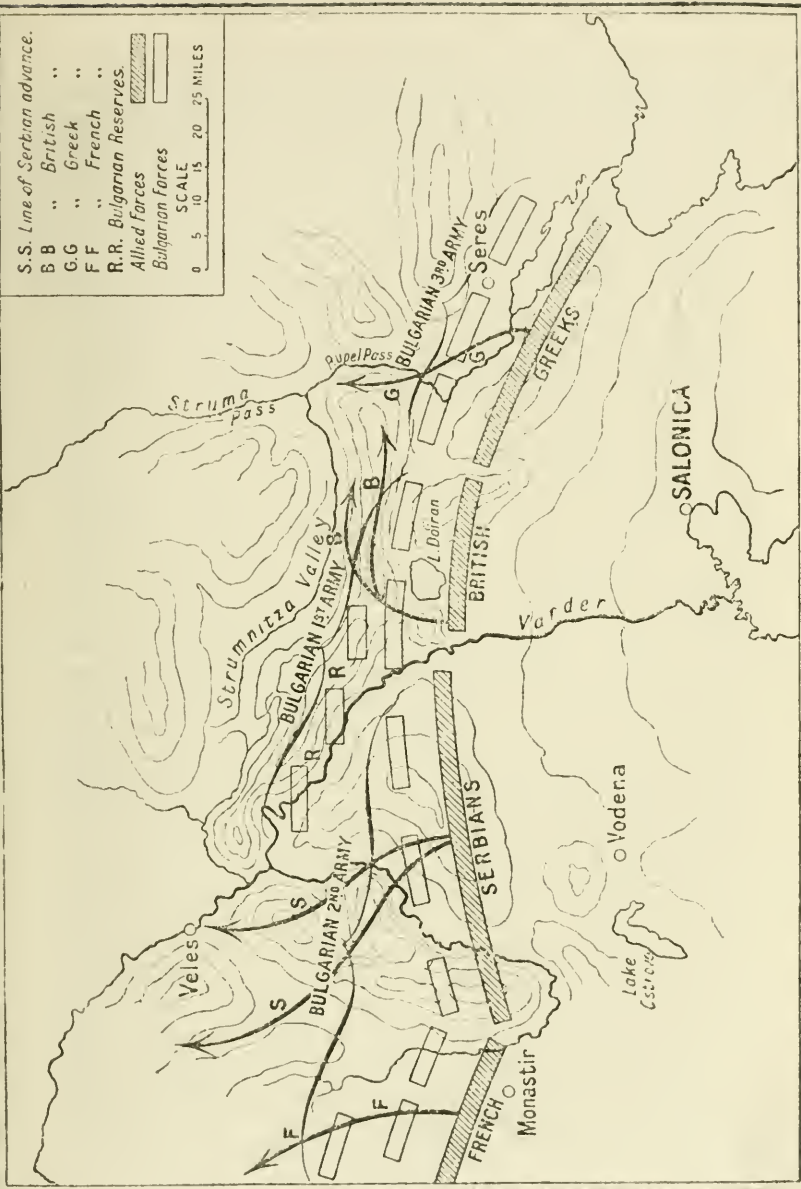
If the enemy had, as he had hoped, succeeded in Italy at the end of 1917, an attack on his part in the Balkans would have followed for a certainty. As he had not succeeded in Italy, his Balkan enterprise was hung up. If the Balkan rumour was now renewed it was, as events proved, to mask the second attack upon the Piave in June, 1918. But in these matters ruse is met by ruse. The French Headquarters professed to take the Balkan rumour as well founded, and employed it, as has been noted, to deepen the impression that on the front there no more than a passive defence was in view. As evidence of their concern regarding a German-Bulgarian onset, General Guillaumat was replaced by General Franchet d'Esperey, the brilliant commander of the 5th French Army in the battle of the Marne.

Behind these changes in the Allied command-in-chief there was a history. The Serbian commander, General Mischitch, had convinced himself that the enemy front could be successfully attacked and decisively ruptured on his sector. It has been pointed out that of the Allied troops in the line—the Greeks formed the main reserve—the Serbians were by far the strongest element. Seemingly that was not the opinion held on the Bulgarian side. Relatively this central sector of their front had been left weak. It was the most rugged of all this rugged stretch of country. Relying upon that; upon the defences they had laid out—defences in which German engineers had assisted with the best of their skill—and most of all perhaps on the fact that the Serbians were but the remnant of a defeated force—the German view of war as in essence mechanical was inveterate—they had behind this part of the line no body of reserves. If this part of the front gave, the breach could not be made good. They believed, however, that a breach was not possible.

All this the Serbians knew, and it heightened their ardour for attack. After their feat in the capture of Kamakchalan, they considered, and justly enough, that no positions of the same kind could obstruct them. The project was laid before General Sarrail. But to

S.S. Line of Serbian advance.  
 B B " British "  
 G G " Greek "  
 F F " French "  
 R.R. Bulgarian Reserves.  
 Allied Forces  
 Bulgarian Forces

SCALE  
 0 5 10 15 20 25 MILES



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him it appeared impracticable. To try it and fail over it would indisputably leave the plan he favoured beyond achievement. Not content with a refusal, the Serbians appealed to Headquarters in France. Foch thought they ought to be allowed to try. He doubtless had a truer estimate of their military qualities. There was nothing for it in the face of this difference save for Sarraill to return. Guillaumat went out with the instructions already indicated. In the meantime, the Serbian plan was under consideration. Fully informed regarding it, Franchet d'Esperey, when he replaced Guillaumat, was told to judge with an open mind, and decide for himself on the spot. His decision was affirmative.

It now only remained to co-ordinate the other Allied movements with the Serbian attack. Assuming the enemy centre to be ruptured the plan was to shepherd the Bulgarian army north of Monastir into the mountains to the north-west, where, on hostile ground, they would be compelled to surrender. In connection with this movement the Italians were to move out from Valona, and, to divert the enemy's attention, attack the Austrian lines covering Elbassan and Durazzo. The rôle assigned to the British and the Greeks east of the Vardar was to attack round Lake Doiran, and, threatening an irruption along the Vardar valley, to hold and engage the enemy reserves, so that their movement up the Vardar valley and by the pass across the mountains to Prilep would be delayed until too late.

The plan, taking it altogether, was sound, and the more so because the very boldness of the intended Serbian move obviated suspicion regarding it. In front of the Serbians, who were based upon Vodena, was a mass of rocky and precipitous hills. They meant to sweep over these in a broad frontal assault. That would bring them to a wild upland valley, where a rally on the part of the defeated enemy would be out of the question. On the farther side of this valley rose the great ridge dividing it from the pass leading from the Vardar gorge to Prilep. Over the ridge the Serbians would take the pass side on,

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and once there they would have severed the enemy's main communication east and west. The rest would be a gathering up of the pieces.

To give effect to this plan, it was necessary that an attack should be opened simultaneously along the whole Allied front so that the enemy should not know where the real blow was to fall. In the meantime, raiding was actively indulged in. To the Bulgarian peasants who formed the mass of the enemy forces, the prolonged struggle and the tedium of two years of trench warfare were becoming insupportable. Proofs were not wanting of a mutinous spirit. The Bulgarians had entered into the war with a certain military pride, which the events in Serbia in 1915 and the earlier part of 1916 had gone to confirm. After those events they looked upon themselves as masters of the Balkans, and their Serbian rivals as finally finished. But the bitter struggle along the lines in Macedonia and the pressure of German rigidity had gone a long way to disillusion them. They had met with heavy losses, and more and more the fact, by no means a pleasant fact, that the Germans were the real rulers of Bulgaria, had stood out. After all, it was evident that the Bulgarian peasant was to get little out of it save losses, and the neglect of his fields season after season. The heavy hand of discipline on the German model could not keep these murmurs down. Deserters began to come into the British lines in steadily growing numbers. From the information gleaned there was afoot a German-Bulgarian project for a general attack upon the sector east of the Vardar, and as far as the sea. Possibly the enemy genuinely entertained such a scheme, pushed by his difficulties about *moral*; possibly, and more probably, the suggestion had been given out in order to lead the troops to believe that the end was at hand. At this time (June, 1918) the Austrian attack in Italy was about to be launched, and there was a strong conviction as to its success, and also the last German thrust on the West was being prepared. If those projects were brought off, then, of course, an offensive in the Balkans would follow. Neither project,



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however, was brought off. Therefore, in the Balkans the Allies were given a little longer time in which to mature their enterprise. Under the transport conditions it took time to accumulate the necessary shell.

The delay was inevitable, but as it could hardly have failed to do, it put the enemy on the alert. His suspicions were now fully aroused. It remained plain, however, that he did not know where the blow would fall, and least of all thought it would fall upon his centre.

To confirm any misimpression he might have formed under that head, the British on September 1 suddenly bit off between Lake Doiran and the Vardar a strongly fortified rocky bluff which formed a salient in the hostile front. This portended an advance along the Vardar valley, which the captured position had obstructed. There were resolute Bulgarian attempts to retake the lost position, but the 2nd Gloucesters and the 10th Hampshires who had seized the bluff were not to be turned out. On the extreme right a few days later the Greeks broke out and pushed the enemy along the Struma valley. It was another jumping-off position gained.

The main battle opened on September 14. From Lake Doiran to Monastir the guns pounded the Bulgarian defences. At daybreak on September 15 the Serbian infantry stormed up the heights which had been for so many months confronting them. On the other side lay their homes, and those left behind who had suffered the extreme of oppression. Stronger motive never appealed to the valour of any army.

No fortifications could arrest these mountaineers. It was not in the ordinary sense a set attack. There was no attempt at "dressing." It was an attack in which, though its cohesion and discipline were superb, the wits of every man were brought into play. In mountaineering tactics, individual initiative is everything. Here it was carried to the highest level. The attackers penetrated everywhere. Nor did they approach by expected places. Those places they knew—to avoid. They came up by unexpected places, and they were in and among the defending troops before the latter could

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well recover from their surprise. The encounter was short, desperate, and annihilating. The front line broken and its defenders wiped out, the assault dashed for the second line, and that went too. The same scenes were repeated. The Bulgarian survivors, panic stricken, were on the run, everything that could impede flight left behind them. The breach was twelve kilometres wide. Spreading behind it on either side the attack speedily widened the gap to twenty-five kilometres. On these uplands the broken enemy could not rally; there was nothing to hold on to. And the assault moved across country with an irresistible sweep. On the second day it had reached and seized the ridge commanding the Prilep pass. This terrible column, now that it had broken out, shot straight for its mark, all the ordinary hesitations of war cast aside. To the enemy the rapidity of the advance was staggering and bewildering. The character of the opening may be gathered from the fact that the Bulgarians never faced these assailants again.

The Bulgarian army in the west was now isolated, and if it could not, a very difficult matter, reach Prizrend before the Serbians, its fate was sealed. The attempt was made—and failed. What was left of the force had to lay down its arms.

There still appeared to be the possibility that the Serbians as they advanced might be attacked in flank from the east. The manœuvre cannot, speaking now after the event, be considered more than a possibility, but since in any case it would have impeded the Serbian advance, it had been judged necessary to provide against it. The provision was a British attack on the Bulgarian positions astride the Vardar, and round Lake Doiran. This operation began on September 18.

It was an operation of most exceptional, not to say deterrent, intricacy. West of the lake the enemy held a tumble of hills, bare, steep-sided, cleft by deep ravines. This scorified ridge was lowest on the east, where its end rose almost like a cliff from the lake, and highest on the west where its elevation attained 2,000 feet above sea-level, and commanded from the summit a view south as

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far as Salonica. Along these hills there were three lines of hostile defences, rock-hewn, inter-connected by tunnels. At every suitable point, and there were many such points, were emplacements for enfilading fire. Considering this the key of his front, the enemy had here the cream of his force, and the stronghold was a maze of machine-gun nests, mostly fortified by the use of concrete. It was no temporary fortification. It was intended permanently to command the Vardar valley and the way to and from Salonica.

The disposition of the British and Greek troops was : west of the Vardar the 27th Division ; between the Vardar and Lake Doiran the 22nd and 26th Divisions, and the Seres Division of the Greek National Corps of Defence ; and east of Lake Doiran, for the purpose of a turning movement, the 28th Division, and the Cretan Division of the National Defence Corps. The attack upon the ridge was entrusted to Lieut.-General Sir H. F. M. Wilson ; the turning movement to Lieut.-General C. J. Briggs.

The main attack and its fortunes may be touched upon first. Against the ridge all the available heavy artillery, British and Greek, was concentrated, and on September 14 a bombardment had been opened. It continued during the intervening four days, directed as usual upon connecting points or joints of the defences.

That a position such as this could be taken by storm was in truth hardly to be expected. The substantial object was to compel the enemy to throw his strength into the defence, and delay his retreat.

In the assault most of the Greek troops were on the right of the line, facing therefore the lower end of the ridge. They gallantly penetrated well into the defences, seized the hill overlooking the ruins of the town of Doiran, and in the mazes of the works and dug-outs, rounded up a large haul of prisoners.

In the centre, too, the attack went well ; indeed, bearing in mind the character of the defences and of the ground, surprisingly well. Welsh and Greek troops, advancing side by side, pushed into the defences to the

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depth of a mile. The ground was cut up by trenches and saps in all directions, and obstructed in all directions by entanglements. From artificial caves blasted out of the rocky sides of the ravines and then faced in with concrete, the enemy poured a machine-gun fire. The resistance in the trenches, too, was violent. Nevertheless, the defence was overpowered, and the losses inflicted upon the Bulgarians were heavy. The opposition, in fact, broke up, and the assault was carried forward to the lower slopes of a hill named the Grande Couronne, the eastern access to the highest part of the ridge.

But on the left, though the attack had been equally dashing and as conspicuously gallant, it had, unfortunately, not prospered. It was headed by the 12th Cheshires and the 9th South Lancashires, with the 8th Shropshires in support. These dauntless fellows, forming the 66th Brigade of Infantry, though they had a stiff climb, as well as the like obstacles to encounter, carried the first and second lines of the works. Reaching the third line they were held up by a machine-gun fusillade of exceptional severity. There was no choice save to fall back. Digging in on these bare rocks was an impossibility. They rallied first amid the wreckage of the captured second line, and next in that of the first line, but in the end had to retire to their starting point, their strength reduced to one-third.

Inevitably this retirement, uncovering the flank of the centre column, forced them also to withdraw. They fell back slowly, though pressed by the hostile reserves. The retirement was covered by the 7th South Wales Borderers. When their own line was reached the Borderers mustered 19 unwounded men and one wounded officer.

The assault had been repulsed ; but was it futile ? Not so far as concerned the substantial object of the operation. The reserves of the enemy had been drawn in. It meant that the Serbian stab at the enemy's vitals would be driven more surely home.

That night, therefore, the bombardment by the heavy guns was resumed, and next morning the assault began



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again. A regiment of the 14th Greek Division was brought up, and launched in conjunction with three Scottish battalions against the centre position, now re-established on the enemy's old third line. Once more this attack got well forward; but also once more that on the left could not make headway. His former defences smashed up, the enemy had during the night rushed up a number of field batteries, and now employed them to put down a heavy barrage. The 65th Brigade of Infantry were in this try. They had been in reserve, recuperating. They got through the barrage; but on the steep, bare slopes they could not—nobody could—pass the enfilade of the machine-guns. It was, in short, a repetition of the experience on the preceding day. The centre column exposed had to fall back. The Scots fell back sullenly, contesting the ground yard by yard. They were the 12th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; the 8th Royal Scots; the 11th Scottish Rifles. The three battalion commanders were either killed or wounded.

The position now was that the lower part of the ridge had been seized, but that the enemy still held the higher part. The British and Greek casualties had been heavy, but the Bulgarian losses had been yet heavier, and there were 1,200 prisoners. All the hostile reserves had had to be thrown into the struggle. As reserves they were now, and for the purpose of any opposition to the Serbians, useless.

The turning movement to the east and round by the north of Lake Doiran had driven in the enemy's advanced positions and at two points had penetrated his main line. These gaps, however, were not wide enough to be exploited.

In the circumstances, there was a marking of time. But on September 21 the Serbians had reached Gradista on the Vardar, threatening the hostile line of retreat along the Strumnitza valley, the main road to Sophia. Then began all the evidences of a hurried flight. Enemy depots of stores were in flames; explosions of ammunition dumps followed one another in quick succession. The route along the Vardar valley barred, the enemy's



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only road out was the pass running north from Lake Doiran across the Belech Mountains into the Strumnitza valley. Airmen reported that it was choked by masses of men and transport. It became the target for bombing squadrons, and low-flying attacks with machine-guns. The struggling column tumbling over itself to get along the narrow road was thrown into indescribable confusion, the way obstructed with wreckage, fallen animals, and abandoned guns. The losses inflicted by these attacks were severe.

The question of whether the attacks upon the ridge west of Lake Doiran were worth while may now be answered. But for those attacks the Bulgarian forces, undelayed, might have fallen back in good order. By fighting the action of September 18 and 19, and throwing their reserves into it, they allowed the main door behind them to be closed. They could no longer extricate themselves as an army. They could only get out as a broken and disorganised mob. And it was as such a mob that the survivors reached the valley of the Strumnitza.

At daybreak on September 22 the British and Greek forces round Lake Doiran started out on the pursuit. On September 24 the Derbyshire Yeomanry, the advance guard of the Column of General Briggs, crossed the frontier into Bulgaria. Next day the main body had descended into the valley of the Strumnitza, and struck the main road to Sophia. The Belech mountains were at the same time cleared of enemy rearguards.

The Bulgarian army on the lower Struma remained to be dealt with. Its way out lay along the gorge of the Upper Struma, through the Rupel pass, and next through the Kresna pass. The gorge of the Upper Struma runs roughly north and south; the Strumnitza valley west to east. The top ends of each are but a few miles one from the other, and are joined by a road running through the little town of Petrie. Towards Petrie the force of General Briggs was now directed, while on his right the Cretan Division and a brigade of British infantry (the 228th) moved along the crest of the Belech range in order to descend into the Struma defile farther to the

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south. The enemy was found by the airmen in hasty retreat in the Kresna pass, which narrow and precipitous outlet, walled on either side by towering cliffs, was choked by his flying masses, men and transport mingled together. Here, too, the bombers speedily rendered the road impassable with wreckage.

In twelve days the military force of Bulgaria had been destroyed. Guns, motor cars, and stores were found strewn among the mountains along every track of the retreat.

The great battle had opened on September 14; on September 26 a Bulgarian *parlementaire* appeared before the British lines bearing a white flag. He was passed on to Headquarters at Salonica. On the 30th September the capitulation of Bulgaria had been signed.

In the order of time Bulgaria was the first of the hostile States to give way. The rapidity of the collapse was to the public almost startling. It was not known how complete and irreversible had been the military victory. While the part taken by the British, French and Greek forces in that victory had contributed to render it both swift and crushing, the Serbian feat of arms remains unsurpassed in war. The forces of General Mischitch swept on to Nish, Belgrade and the Danube, a triumphant embodiment of valour glorified by the purest love of their common country.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BRITISH FORCES IN ITALY

Strategical effects of Italy's entry into the war—Motives of Italian policy—Eastern military scheme of the Central Powers rendered abortive—Changes of 1917—Reasons for the attack in Italy—The German and Austrian final bid for victory—Italy's military problems—The action at Caporetto and the Italian retreat from the Isonzo—Its real meaning—Political influences and military principles—Dispatch of British divisions to Italy—The appointment of General Diaz—Reasons for his choice of the Piave position—German-Austrian disadvantages—Repulse of the Austrian attack—The second Battle of the Piave—Changes in Enemy tactics—The second Austrian defeat—Characteristics of the Italian Campaign—Preparations for the Italian final stroke—Disposition of the Austrian forces—The plans of General Diaz—*Rôle* of the British troops in the Attack—Capture of Grave di Papadopoli—Opening of the main operations—British forces cross the Piave—Success of the Italian scheme—Combat on the Tagliamento—Rout and capitulation of the Austrians.

DURING the latter part of 1917—the date may be fixed by the breakdown of the Russian offensive of the summer of that year in Galicia, and the *débâcle* of the Russian forces—there occurred in the relationship of the Italian to the other Allied fronts an important strategical change. Up to that time, and so long as Russia remained effectively in the field, the Italian campaign has, from the standpoint of its strategical effect, to be regarded rather as part of the Eastern than of the Western Allied effort. To the whole weight of Austria-Hungary, and to the aid, by no means inconsiderable, which could be rendered to the Central Powers by Bulgaria and Turkey, the Allies, after the entry of Italy into the war in April, 1915, were able to oppose the armies of Russia and Italy, the Allied force based upon

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Salonica, and the British Expeditions in Asia Minor. Later there was added the army of Rumania.

Now it is evident to begin with that if the total military strength of the Central Powers could have been at the outset concentrated upon the West, the then Western Allies, Great Britain and France, judging upon probabilities, could not have withstood it. Such a concentration Russia made impossible, and the check which the Germans experienced on the Marne, as well as the difficulty they found in recovering from that reverse, must in part, and certainly in the negative sense, be attributed to the Russian counterpoise. Further, that counterpoise was emphasised by the signal defeats inflicted during the earlier months of the war upon the Austrian armies. Not only had they to be detached to deal with the Russian menace; they had disastrously failed to deal with it. Coincidentally, the Germans, striving to retrieve on the West, had hardly less disastrously missed their aim, and the miss had been clinched by the first battle of Ypres. Austria worsted, they found themselves not merely reduced on the West to the defensive, but obliged, contrary to their initial plan, to divide their own forces. It happened, unfortunately for the Western Allies, that they, on their part, were not then able to follow up tactically the strategical success which had attended their manœuvres. They were obliged, while Britain was preparing her new armies, to mark time. And partly because there was then no real belief among German experts in the efficient expansion of the British Army, the Germans, taking the bull by the horns, determined forthwith to shift their main offensive effort from West to East, and with what was left of the armies of Austria, still numerous and powerful, to crush Russia before the situation on the west underwent further change.

In those circumstances it became evident in the second place that Russia, cut off from access to the Western Allies by way of the Baltic and the Black Sea, would be overweighted, for the Germans were well aware of the limits of Russian staying power. Obligated to divert a part of her resources to cope with the Turks in the

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Caucasus, Russia, isolated, could hardly single-handed long withstand this hostile Eastward concentration. The Allied forces in Asia Minor and the Balkans barely sufficed to keep Bulgarians and Turks at bay. In a word, taking the Eastern front comprehensively, the German aim was, while time allowed, to create a superiority, and to all appearances they *could* create it. The effect sooner or later must be that, prevailing on the East, the Central Powers, a good proportion of the troops of Austria being now free to co-operate with the German army, could rebound on the West and prevail there also. In this, indeed, lay their substantial chance of victory.

But the entry of Italy into the war on the side of the Allies altered the balance fundamentally. Italy is a Great Power. The Italian army numbered, with reserves, little short of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  millions of men. And it was an army in the first grade of military merit. The policy of Italy has not always been clearly understood, and probably no event in the war has been the subject of so much obfuscation as Italian support of the Allied cause. In face of the northern frontier of Italy as then traced—leaving all the strong places along the line of the Alps in Austrian hands, as well as doors into the Italian plain—and looking at Austrian control of the Adriatic, it would, when the Government of Italy was in 1883 invited to join the alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary, have been dangerous to refuse. There was at that time no Anglo-French Entente, nor was there for more than twenty years afterwards. Nevertheless, this proposed alliance was not only distasteful to Italian feeling; having regard to the record of Austrian rule and influence in Italy and to ambitions known still to be entertained at Vienna, if not at Berlin, the suggested compact was at variance with the settled aim of Italian statesmanship. Since the reunion of Italy that aim had always been the achievement of the country's independence by freeing it from the hold of the hereditary enemy beyond the Alps. On the other hand, as open refusal would have been impolitic, the practicable course was to accept—with a reservation. The reser-



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vation limited Italy's part in the alliance to a defensive. Only if the Central Powers were attacked did Italy become subject to any obligation. If they were the aggressors, she was under none. Seeing that they had put forward their proposal as intended, so they averred, merely to keep the peace of Europe, and from no other motive, the reservation was one the Central Powers could not, without awkward revelation, decline to fall in with. They seem to have thought that in the event of an aggressive war on their part Italy was in honour bound to remain neutral. It was, however, not "so nominated in the bond," and the statesmen of Italy were in 1915 far-sighted enough to see that if national aims were to be realised it was then or never. If the abstention of Italy helped the Central Powers to win, Italian dependence would be alike aggravated and confirmed.

These, briefly stated, were the Italian motives. What has here to be considered is the military result. With Italy in the field the forces of Austria had now to be divided like those of Germany. Instead, therefore, of the new Eastern scheme being relatively sure, and relatively rapid in its execution, its issue became doubtful and its execution prolonged. Not merely had Italian intervention, however, an effect on the front in Russia, rendering the campaign of 1915 there inconclusive; the effect was also felt, and unmistakably, in the Balkans and in Asia Minor. It enabled the Russians in the Caucasus to pass to the offensive; it delayed the German-Austrian attack upon Serbia. And it was also felt on the West, for owing to the division of the Austrian forces Germany had to throw more of her own troops into the Eastern advance. The campaign in Russia became a deadly drain, and finally forced the German Government, seeing that a purely military decision in the East was not to be looked for, and that the strength of the Allies was mounting in the West, to resort to the expedients which brought about the Russian Revolution.

When at length, in the autumn of 1917, the Russian army had been by revolutionary propaganda broken

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down, and the Provisional Government of Kerensky was at grips with the rising tide of Bolshevism, Germany's Eastern scheme had been so far accomplished that Russia no longer counted as a military factor, Rumania had been involved in Russia's political collapse, and Serbia overrun. The quarter where the scheme had failed had been Turkey-in-Asia. In the Balkans it remained incomplete and in abeyance. Nevertheless, looking at the German failure before Verdun, the reverse on the Somme, and the German reverses on the West during 1917, it had become necessary to chance these Balkan and Turkish risks, and, dealing with the line in Italy as now part of the Western front, to focus the united weight of the Central Powers in that direction.

This is the strategical change referred to. From the autumn of 1917 the operations in Italy have in fact to be regarded as part of those in the main and Western theatre of war.

In their plans for the attack upon France in 1914 the German General Staff had committed a profound mistake. They had gravely under-estimated the French army, and they regarded the British military force as negligible. These misjudgments had adversely affected their fortunes. It cannot now be doubted that, when on discovery of the error as regarded the French, Turkey was hastily dragged into the conflict, the superiority of the Turkish forces, German-trained, over any troops Great Britain could pit against them was accepted at Berlin as axiomatic. The success of operations against the British in Egypt was relied upon as sure. That again proved to be a misjudgment. If we inquire into the reason which in 1916 urged the German Staff prematurely to exploit on the West and in Italy such success, more showy than substantial, as they had in 1915 been able to achieve in Russia and the Balkans, by overrunning Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic Provinces, and Serbia, the answer will be found partly in the Turkish failures, partly in the formidable character of the Italian pressure, and partly in the steady growth of the British military strength in France. The active

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prosecution of the Eastern scheme as the primary German operation was suspended. On the West, the attack was launched against Verdun; in Italy, the counter-offensive by way of the Trentino. Both enterprises fell through, and the decision to enter upon them must be ranked as another error, hardly less grave than that which had vitiated German plans in 1914. Notwithstanding, therefore, the advance in Russia and the defeat of Rumania, the outlook for the Central Powers at the end of 1916, when the German Emperor made his first offer of peace, was gloomy. On the West there had been for the second time a costly check; the Eastern scheme had been indecisive, though every estimate had been far exceeded; efforts to exploit its results had failed; German resources, both military and economic, had been heavily impaired, and those of Austria yet more exhausted. Nothing but the inactivity of the Russians saved the Central Empires and gave them the opportunity for a final rally.

It will be seen, then, that the intervention of Italy, upsetting Germany's Eastern scheme, had not only emphasised the initial German mistake on the West, but had contributed most materially to shape the events of 1916. The effect of it had been felt in every theatre of hostilities, just as, conversely, the effect of Russia's political and military collapse, prolonging the war for at least another year, was not less universal. These two events—the participation of Italy and the breakdown of Russia—rank with the Allied blockade, the creation of the new British army and the intervention of the United States, as those which in the main governed the conflict and its issue. Unquestionably it was appreciation of the military importance of Italian action and of its for them disastrous consequences which led the Germans in the autumn of 1917 to put the defeat of Italy in the forefront of their final bid for victory.

The Italian campaign against Austria was impeded by serious natural difficulties. As already pointed out, the frontier had been so drawn as to give Austria all the advantages alike of attack and of defence. The Trentino

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formed an enclave south of the main chain of the Alps, leaving in the hands of Austria the Brenner pass, and, in military language, this considerable wedge-shaped bridgehead on the Italian side of it. And the bridgehead—the Trentino valley—was bounded on the east by the chain of the Dolomite Alps, and on the west by another line of secondary heights across which the one practicable road was the Tonale pass. As a jumping-off place, therefore, it was singularly secure, while it could be defended with comparatively moderate forces. At the same time, on the north-east the frontier had been so delimited as to leave in Austrian hands on the Italian side of the main Alpine chain the line of the Isonzo, strong bridgeheads on its western bank, the fortress of Goritzia, the plateau of the Carso, and the Tolmino pass through which the Isonzo finds its way from the higher mountains. And all these north-eastern positions had been converted by Austria at once into an elaborate system of defence, and into a door behind which forces might safely be massed, and poured on to the Venetian plain. From the Tolmino pass to the sea the frontier of Italy was not only an open frontier, but it was also confronted with another Austrian position scientifically and at great cost prepared for a hostile inroad. It was absurd to suppose that the Government of Austria had maintained these positions south of the Alps, and had squeezed itself for the money to fortify them on modern lines, with no ulterior object in view. Little more than half a century had gone by since Austria had held rich possessions in Northern Italy, and the known and historic persistence of Austrian policy left it certain that their loss was looked upon in Vienna as no more than temporary. Besides, for centuries Italy had been treated as a German reversion and dependency.

Before the Italians when they entered into the war there lay two clear alternatives. The first was an attack upon the Trentino while maintaining a defensive on the Isonzo front; the second the reverse of this—an attack upon the Isonzo positions, while maintaining a defensive along the Trentino frontier. The defensive in either



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case would have to be of an active character, but it would be a defensive all the same.

The alternative adopted was the second, and the reasons for the choice were that to direct the main attack upon and engage the main Italian forces in the Trentino would lay the Italians open to a dangerous hostile rebound from the Isonzo. Conversely, if the Isonzo positions were mastered, not only would the worst menace to Italy be removed, but the line of the Trentino could in any event be held. It was a choice, in short, of the safer defensive combined with an attack which promised the more substantial results. Though in discussions on the point it has often been overlooked, the fact has to be kept in mind that in forming their plans *the Italians had to provide against such a possible turn of the common Allied fortunes as would bring down upon them the weight of Central Europe*. One inspiration of their plan was provision against that contingency, and since in entering the war they had accepted very grave risks, the desire was so to conduct their campaign as to render an Austro-German attack abortive. If they mastered the Isonzo positions, leaving only the ingress through the Trentino, that object would be achieved.

It has been seen that the attempted Austrian rebound by way of the Trentino in May and June, 1916, failed, a sufficient proof that these calculations on the part of the Italian General Staff were well founded. But in the autumn of 1917 the contingency apprehended came to pass. The political weakness of Russia, always the basis of it, had brought it about. Italian operations on the Isonzo were still incomplete. True, the Italians had taken Goritzia, a magnificent feat of arms; had established themselves on the Bainsizza plateau to the north of it; and had won a footing on the Carso to the south, but the whole of these operations were a vast siege, and a siege, moreover, of probably the strongest and most carefully fortified military positions in the world. It was this situation of affairs—this incompleteness—which gave the Germans and Austrians their opportunity.

And now for the first time, seeing that strategically



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the line in Italy had become part of the Western front, six picked divisions of German troops took part in the Austro-German counter-offensive.

Events which followed need only be touched upon here in outline. The siege operations on and beyond the Isonzo were being carried on by the 3rd Italian army; on its left and covering its flank was the 2nd Italian army, holding the positions in the hills, and strung out as far as the upper valley of the Tagliamento. The positions included the Tolmino pass; the pass leading from Caporetto to Cividale; and Monte Rombon in the upper Isonzo valley. It was at those three points that the attack at the end of October, 1917, was delivered. Caporetto was captured, and so suddenly and swiftly—the resistance of the Italian brigade just then holding it was certainly not adequate, and the failure has been attributed to political disaffection—that no opportunity was afforded for closing the breach thus made. The enemy advanced rapidly over the pass to Cividale, threatening the main Italian base at Udine, and his movement not only isolated the Italian force holding Monte Rombon, though that force had held out, but turned the Tolmino pass, and left the flank of the 3rd Army completely exposed. There was nothing left for the 3rd Army save to fall back, abandoning all the positions gained on and across the Isonzo, Goritzia included. Swiftmess of movement could now alone save the 3rd Italian Army from total disaster. As for the 2nd Army, there was not even that resource. It could only retreat along lines converging upon the very point, Udine, for which the enemy was making, and with a long start in his favour. The 2nd Army was therefore captured or destroyed with all its equipment. The 3rd Army, with a pressure on its flank from the north, and followed by the main strength of the hostile forces, also met with very serious losses; but one of the most remarkable feats of the war, and a striking proof of Italian discipline and *moral*, was the retirement of the 3rd Italian Army in the circumstances and the salving of the larger proportion of its guns. Against the 3rd

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Army the enemy missed his stroke, and, as it proved, the one opportunity which could have made his adventure a success.

At the time the real meaning and significance of the miss were not generally perceived. For the many who judged matters upon a material footing, the outstanding fact was that, estimated by prisoners and by guns and other equipment captured, this was the most resounding victory the Germans and Austrians had so far achieved. Seeing that the enemy had nevertheless missed his stroke, and that the line in Italy had become part of the West front, the strategical reply was an Allied attack in France—the operation, for example, against Cambrai, for that would in Italy snatch from the enemy his ability to retrieve. That view, however, though from the military standpoint indisputable, and presenting, besides, the advantage of an economy of forces, now all the more important owing to the collapse in Russia, was a view confined to military men. On the Allied side there had been growing a tendency on the part of politicians in Great Britain and in France alike to participate in the direction of operations in the field, and it was inevitable that the participation should be swayed by popular considerations, and override military principles where the latter ran counter to them. From France there were sent into Italy very considerable forces—including five British divisions. Naturally the movement brought Allied activity on the West to a standstill, and for the moment, and while the movement was being carried out, it actually in Italy assisted the German-Austrian operations. Apart from the heavy expense of this transfer, two Allied armies were for some weeks, and those weeks crucial, out of play.

The motive which influenced the movement was an appeal to popular *moral*, and so complex are the currents of a great war that it is quite an open question whether the appeal to popular *moral* did not offset the military risk. In political opinion, notwithstanding that representation was at the time the other way about, the main danger lay in failure of the popular *moral* in Italy

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rather than in the peril to Italy's armed forces. Possibly the political opinion was right, and possibly enough the warm public welcome given in Italian cities to the British and French divisions on their way to the front went to re-establish self-confidence in the Italian army. All that was necessary was that the *moral* of the Italian army, temporarily strained, should be reaffirmed. Given such reaffirmation, that army was sufficiently strong to deal with the largest force the enemy could maintain south of the Alps.

The first step of the Italian Government had been to replace General Cadorna as chief of the Italian forces by General Diaz, a very resolute commander. The impact of a fresh mind was advisable. According to current speculation, the Italians, if they did not or could not stand upon the line of the Tagliamento, would find themselves compelled to fall back upon the line of the Adige, and so leave Vicenza, Padua, and Venice in the enemy's hands. General Diaz adopted neither of these courses. He rallied his forces, and very wisely, upon the line of the Piave. It was the first of many proofs that his appointment had been fortunate.

One of the peculiarities of north-eastern Italy is that between the foothills of the Alps and the coast-line of the Adriatic the country is perfectly flat. Owing to this flatness, the rivers crossing it spread out into numerous parallel channels, which in times of flood overflow and form one broad, shallow sheet of water. The Tagliamento is a stream of that character, and, save when in spate, no military obstacle worth considering. The Tagliamento, besides, crossed the Friuli plain at its broadest point. At the northern end, too, of this so-called line of the Tagliamento there is an important pass, through which runs a railway connected with the Austrian base at Klagenfurt. Not merely, then, would the Italians on the Tagliamento have had a front at once extended and difficult to hold; they would have been open to a flanking movement on the north, and in the rear to a coincident menace from the Trentino it would not have been easy to counter. In short,

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however regarded, the line of the Tagliamento was for an army carrying out a rearward manœuvre nothing better than a trap, and no competent commander would have entertained the idea of accepting battle upon it for a moment.

But farther west, where the Piave debouches from the hills on to the flats, the fringe of plain is at its narrowest. The foothills here are not more than twenty miles from the coast; they form, in fact, a kind of elbow, and the approach of the coast-line and the hills a kind of gateway. The Piave marks the line of this threshold of inner Italy as it were. Again for some miles of its lower course the Piave runs through marshes, in the face of effective opposition impassable; and where it debouches from the hills there is on its western bank a long ridge, a sort of outlyer of the foothills cut off from them by the river. This outlyer, the Montello, commands the flat country both to the south and, in part, beyond the Piave to the east. The gateway is thus restricted on both sides—on the side of the sea by the swamps; on the side of the hills by a bastion capable of strong defence.

Once more this gateway is contiguous with the line of heights south-east of the Trentino, on which in 1916 the Italians fought and won the great battle which wrecked the Austrian thrust of that year. To the Italian troops, therefore, the position was familiar ground, and not only familiar, but inspiring with memories of triumph, while to the enemy its memories were of ill-omen. Is it not clear that an able general would pitch upon this position to put his fortunes to the proof? Retirement to the Adige would have—could not fail in the circumstances to have—an effect upon the *moral* of his forces which no natural obstacles would counter-balance.

On the line of the Piave, then, the Italians took their stand, and there were two other reasons for it. On this line the communications between the extreme left and the extreme right of the enemy forces delivering an attack were poor, and obstructed. Impossible save after delay which would render the manœuvre useless to move any important body of troops from one to the other



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wing. If the attack took place it must rely upon lines of communication and supply, not only from across the Isonzo, but through the Trentino. And General Diaz was clear-sighted enough to see both that to prepare a heavy attack upon those lines would take time, and that it could not with any hope of success be delivered on any other lines. The interval gave him just the respite he wanted. When the enemy was ready he was ready. It is considerations such as these—the ability, in short, to see the obvious—which shape out victory in war.

In due course the enemy delivered his attack. Short of sitting down on this, for him, bad line, and remaining inactive upon it throughout the winter, he could do nothing else. Handicapped though he was alike by the peculiarities of the terrain and by having to draw his munitions and supplies across passes of the Alps hundreds of miles apart, he did not, as soon as his fresh preparations had been completed, hesitate. The belief apparently prevailed that the Italian army was now an affair of rags and patches. In face of the political outcry, the belief can readily be understood. But the issue did not correspond with Austro-German expectations. The attack was long, and it was costly. It was pressed without regard for losses. Before it was over the British troops (XIVth Corps) on the hills south of the Setti Commune plateau west of the Brenta, and the French troops (XIIth Corps) on the hills east of the Brenta, were in the battle. No effort was spared to get past them. It was in vain. The Italians, too, fought at the top of their form. For the enemy this prolonged struggle was a bloody and crushing repulse.

All through the ensuing winter the baffled invaders could do no more than nurse their wounds. In June, 1918—after the first melting of the snows—they tried again. This time the tactics were varied. At the end of 1917 the main thrust had been down and along both sides of the Brenta valley. It was now distributed. There was a movement across the Piave between the hills and the sea, but strongly supported both by an onset against the Montello and by a flanking movement



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over the old ground astride the Brenta. The change in the tactics must be attributed in part at all events to the fact that the Allies on both sides of the Brenta had meanwhile in sundry minor operations and rebounds, resembling those of the French at Verdun—and the fighting here and at Verdun had many features in common—won back positions of tactical importance. It was hardly to be expected that good fortune could attend a renewed main enemy attack in that quarter.

The importance attached by the Germans and Austrians to this battle in June may be gathered from two circumstances. The last of Austria's military resources were thrown into it, and the Emperor Karl came from Vienna to see the victory achieved. His royal relative, the Archduke Joseph, commanded the Austrian centre, General Wurm the left on the Lower Piave; General Schenkenstaël the right astride the Brenta. The 4th Austrian army was east of the Piave in reserve.

It has been supposed that the Austrian plan was, as before, to deliver the main assault from the north, but it appears to have been rather that of an all-round converging pressure. Assuming the onset to succeed, then the Allies, falling back from east and west of the Brenta, would get into the way of those falling back from the middle and lower Piave, and both in the way of the troops driven from the Montello. In a word, the Italians with their Allies would be jammed, and any project of retiring in good order upon the Adige would be put out of the question. The Italian army would be wrecked where it stood. Repetition of an Italian retirement like that from the Isonzo was not to be chanced. Beyond doubt the chief inspiration of this plan was to prevent any such manœuvre.

And there was another modification of tactics. The Austrians had a superiority in artillery, not so great probably as has been asserted, but nevertheless marked. They employed now the short, sudden, and intensive bombardment. It opened without previous warning at three o'clock in the morning of June 15, and it continued, every piece in action, along the seventy-five miles of

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front, for four hours. Then precisely to zero time, 7 a.m., the infantry went forward.

They crossed the Piave, then at a normal level, the sandbanks showing between its channels, at three points—Nervesa, east of the Montello, Fagare, and San Dona. And their advanced troops having got over—to avoid the effect of the bombardment the Italians had withdrawn some distance from the river bank—began to establish bridgeheads. A number of pontoon bridges were rapidly thrown across. The first effect of the impact, therefore, was that there were these bridgeheads west of the river, and that the eastern end of the Montello had fallen into the enemy's hands. That, however, proved the high-water mark. The whole of the Montello could not be mastered; and on the enemy's right on the Setti Commune plateau the assault had failed. It was thrown chiefly against the British positions, and in a column of great depth, but though in places it forced the front back 1,000 yards, the front held, and the rebound wiped out this inadequate gain. The Allies, too, had held in the Monte Grappa region. In these circumstances, the Italians counter-attacked the bridgeheads, and the real trial of strength came on.

Such was the situation on the third day, June 18. The enemy effort to enlarge the bridgeheads had not succeeded. He was everywhere checked, but as yet he could not be forced back.

On this day, however, the Piave rose in spate. When that occurs the flood sweeps down from the mountains like a tidal wave, the water icy cold. The debris of bridges or other obstacles carried away is swirled along on the foaming torrent, and helps to destroy bridges lower down-stream. Thus it was that one pontoon-bridge after another was reduced to wreck. The pontoons coming down with the flood crashed into those still in position and aided by the momentum of the current racing along at ten miles an hour, wrenched them from their moorings. Some of these bridges were a mile and a half in length. An enormous outlay had been incurred in transporting this mass of bridging material.

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Nearly the whole of it was within a few hours wreckage. At Nervesa, where the sharp bend in the river had lessened the full impact of the flood, and at San Dona, where the river is embanked and deep, the bridges had held. But between those points everything had gone. At this time there were west of the river some 70,000 enemy troops. They found themselves cut off, and it is hardly necessary to add that they were attacked in superior strength. Nearly one-half were made prisoners. Only a small remnant were able to repass the river. The total enemy losses it is not easy to estimate—many were drowned when the bridges gave way—but the whole loss from first to last can hardly have been less than a fourth of the Austrian forces. And all the positions beyond the Piave, the foothold on the Montello included, were wrested back. Once more the enterprise of invasion had been brought to impotence.

So, with little more than minor changes the situation continued through the heats of the summer. These volcanic outbursts of energy followed by periods of quiescence were characteristic of the campaign. Such alternations were inherent in the conditions. On the one hand dependent for munitions on transport across the Alps, the invaders, when they had exhausted one head of shell, found accumulation of another a slow process. Few who are without practical acquaintance with the operations of modern war can form any just idea of the daily traffic needed to keep afoot a force of some 400,000 men. When that traffic had to pass over long and difficult routes, for the most part single-track railways, to add to it the wear and tear of forwarding masses of shell, was a proceeding which had to be carefully regulated, if, with the Alpine gradients, the lines were not to be torn to pieces. Had the Italians possessed an unmistakable advantage in the output of shell, they could after each of these Austrian repulses have attacked with crushing effect. But Italy had to import both coal and iron, and with dwindling tonnage available, she also was handicapped. The disadvantages on the two sides were, in fact, nearly equal.

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In September, 1918, the front in Italy appeared to have fallen back into almost unbroken stagnation. Elsewhere, of course, there were stirring events. The Allied offensive in France and Flanders was at grips with the enemy, and was visibly prevailing; in Syria, General Allenby had entered upon the last stage of his campaign and was driving the Turks before him upon Damascus; in the Balkans, the Bulgarian line had been attacked and broken, and the stress the Germans were under on the West had rendered these enemy breakdowns in the East politically final and fatal.

The time, in short, had come in Italy for the stroke which would rid that fair land once and for all of the barbarian menace that during centuries had been its nightmare.

And General Diaz was ready. It was his unfailing trait to be ready. Never perhaps in all the chequered course of this Italian campaign had the calm to appearances been so profound as in these weeks of September. One brilliantly sunny day of the late Italian summer succeeded another, and the barrier of the Alps, their far-off summits touched with eternal snows, rose into a sky of deep, cloudless blue. Only an occasional gunshot here and there on the plain indicated that war was afoot. Broadly, there was "nothing doing."

These appearances are usually deceptive. At the beginning of September the question was mooted of sending back the British troops in Italy to France. Two of the five divisions had already been returned. It was now proposed, in the first place, to cut down the infantry strength of the three remaining divisions—the 7th, 23rd and 48th—from thirteen to ten battalions apiece, and to dispatch the nine battalions thus spared to France and Flanders. To that proposal, when made, General Diaz offered no objection. The reduction and return were carried out. The remainder of the three divisions were to follow at convenient dates. In accordance with that scheme, the 23rd division was replaced in the line by the XIIth Italian Corps, and, like the 7th, placed in reserve.

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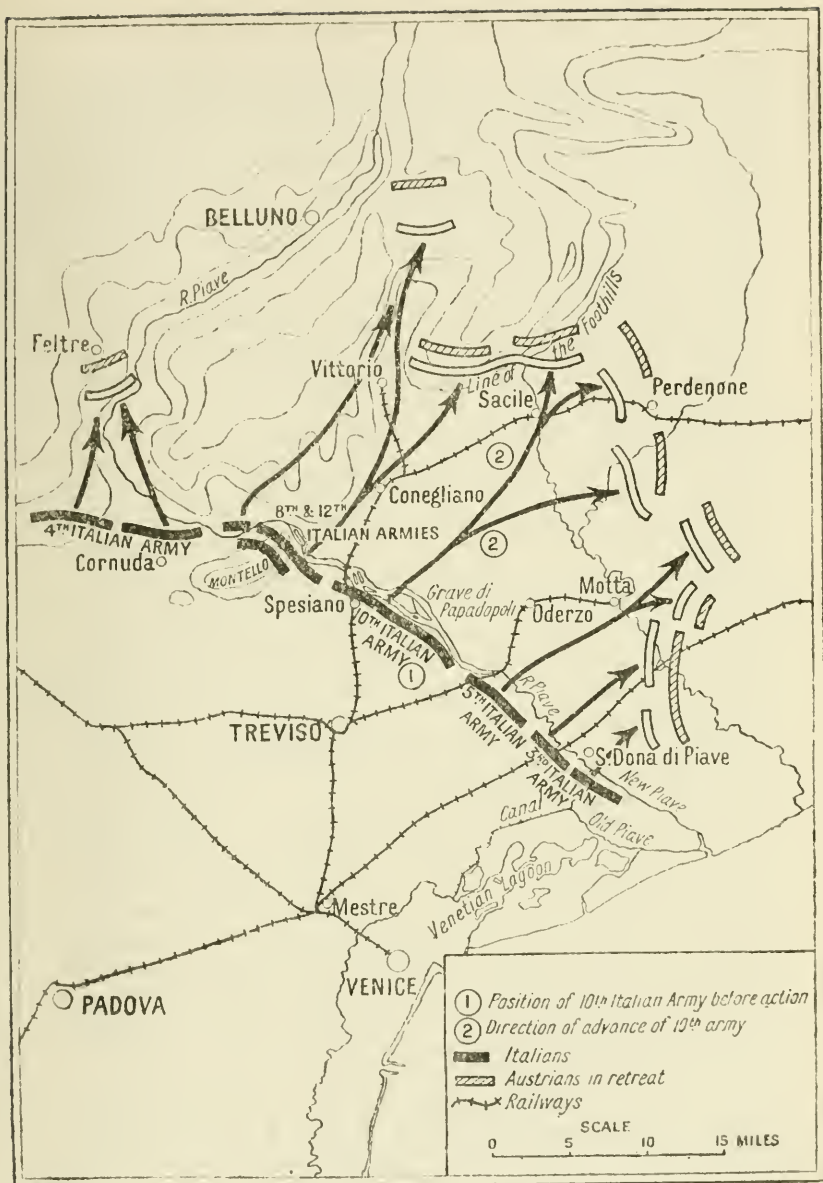
Was all this shuffling part of the effect? Possibly enough. Inklings of such movements have a way of leaking out. Nobody may quite know how, but it happens. The 7th and 23rd were under orders to depart, but the departure was postponed from day to day, difficulties of transport the assigned cause, and in the end—they remained.

On October 6 the British commander, General the Earl of Cavan, received a summons from General Diaz to see him at the Italian Headquarters. Lord Cavan then, under the seal of secrecy, learned the true state of affairs. The front in Italy was on the eve of another explosion.

The plan of General Diaz will be the more readily understood from the explanations already given. The 5th Austrian army lay east of the Piave on the Friuli plain; the 6th Austrian army in the hills west of the Brenta; the enemy centre east of the Brenta and astride the Piave. As always, the weak point of the Austrian position, so far as intercommunication between the extremes of their line was concerned, was the elbow of hills. If the centre were driven in, the wings would be respectively cut off one from the other. It would be total overthrow.

It was a bold plan, and it was to be boldly executed. The attack upon the centre was assigned to the 8th, 12th and 10th Italian armies, grouped for this purpose under the command of General Caviglia. The 8th and 12th, forcing the passage of the Piave above and opposite to the Montello, were to wheel to the north, shepherd the enemy into the mountains by way of Conegliano and Vittorio, and pin him at Belluno. The 10th, advancing upon Sacile, and thus covering the right of the 8th and 12th, was to wedge off this part of the hostile forces from the 5th Austrian army. Likewise, on the *right* of the main attack, the 3rd Italian army was to cross the Lower Piave and drive eastwards, assisted in that operation by a flanking movement against the 5th Austrian army, the direction of this movement being towards the coast. At the same time, on the *left*





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of the main attack the 4th Italian army, assaulting in the Monte Grappa sector, was to advance towards Feltre and by the Val Sugana, turning in that way the flank of the 6th Austrian army, which was also to be attacked frontally, and, isolated, driven westward through the hills into the Trentino. As the Italians had already seized the Tonale pass, the further retreat of these troops could be barred.

The governing idea, it will be seen, was a rupture of the hostile centre by a blow delivered with overpowering weight, and the enlargement of the rupture, when effected, by movements extending fanwise, leading, as the second phase of the battle, to the retreat of the separated Austrian wings under both flanking and rearward pressure. The hostile centre was disposed with its back to the mountains, and that was its peril. If dislodged, it could be dashed against the hills and broken to pieces.

To avoid preliminary movements likely to give the enemy the alarm, the 48th British Division, in the line on the plateau of the Setti Commune, was to remain there, and form part of the army of General Pennella. The 7th and 23rd Divisions were, with the Italian XIth Corps, to constitute the 10th army, and that army was now entrusted to Lord Cavan's command. Its rôle of covering the right flank of the main attack was, as will have been gathered, important.

But a further precaution was advisable. The enemy's impression that these British troops, having been withdrawn from the line, were still out of action, had not to be disturbed. The advance units, therefore, were disguised in Italian uniforms, and before the battle actually opened no shell was fired from a British gun. Information is gleaned from shell fragments, and much more from shells which fail to explode. These British divisions were concentrated round Treviso. The concentration took place on October 16.

Five days later, on October 21, the 7th and 28rd British divisions replaced the XIth Italian Corps on the sector of the Piave below the Montello. The river was

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then in flood, and the problem of bridging it certainly did not look promising. Such a state of things, however, always cuts two ways. It now made the enemy feel the more secure, and it inspired a remarkable and daring adventure. Just opposite this sector on the farther side of the main channel is the island called the Grave di Papadopoli. The Austrians held this island as an advanced post. If the island could be seized, then the bridging of the main channel would become practicable.

Lieut.-General Sir J. M. Babington had formed a project for seizing it, and the idea was approved by his chief. In the night there stole down stream, collected by Captain Odini, of the Italian engineers, a flotilla of punts, each in charge of two Italian *pontiere*, who manage these craft with marvellous dexterity. There were punts enough to hold the whole of the 2nd/1st Battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company. Six men got into each, were silently punted across the main channel, and, landing in the dead of night on the north end of the island, surprised the garrison. It was a dashing affair, and the commander of the battalion, Lieut.-Col. R. N. O'Connor, was a dashing officer. He speedily had all the north end of the island in his power, and despite the attempts to oust him, he stuck to it. And two nights later, the 7th British Division having been transported across the main stream, an attack by them combined with a landing of the 37th Italian Division at the south end finished off the opposition. The island is about four miles in length.

The great battle opened just before midnight on October 26. Along the whole of the front, from the Lower Piave, across the plain, and far away among the hills to the west, the artillery spoke with a crashing roar of defiance. Zero time was at daybreak, 6.45 a.m. It was necessary for the advanced troops of the 10th army to cross the secondary channels east of the Grave di Papadopoli on foot. Some of these brave fellows, loaded with their arms and kit, and struggling with the current, were unhappily drowned; but neither the race of the water nor the hostile fire could hold them. On

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the right were the 23rd Bersagliere (General Fara) and the 37th Italian Division (General Castagnola), on the left the 23rd British Division (Major-General Thullier) and the 7th British Division (Major-General Shoubridge). The stiffest fight was for a footing on the farther bank. While it lasted it was a hard grapple, and here on the British side the heads of the columns, the 22nd Manchesters and the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers, won an undying distinction. They fought magnificently. The defence was broken. After that, once the bridge-heads were established and the bridging pushed forward, it became an irresistible drive.

The chief obstacle to the bridging operations was attack by enemy airmen. More than once the bridges were broken, and with the wash of the current there arose the danger of the broken parts being carried away. But by the night of October 27 the crossing was secure and the bridgehead large, and Italian troops destined for that operation (the XVIIIth Corps) passed over and wheeled to the north, clearing the front of the 8th Army.

The plan of General Diaz had proved brilliantly successful. The enemy centre endeavoured to hold its ground until October 29, but on that day its resistance collapsed, and the fight rolled on towards and through Vittorio.

The 10th Army was also on the move. The hostile trench line had been ruptured, and it had become a war of movement in open country. Under the command of Lieut.-Col. Sir C. B. Lowther, the British Mounted Troops went on ahead, clearing roads and securing bridges before they could be destroyed. In this way they seized the important bridge over the Monticano. The bridge had been mined, but the enemy was given no chance to fire his explosives.

And everywhere he was falling back. The country became alight with the fires from his consuming stores. His final effort to rally in front of the 10th Army was on the Monticano. But the passage of that river was rapidly forced ; and the pursuit began again, if anything with greater ardour. The whole strength of the Italian

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cavalry was now in the field, while yet farther in advance the air squadrons held practically undisputed possession of the sky, blockading the retreat. Guns were being gathered in literally by the thousand—the 7th and 23rd British Divisions alone captured 217—and prisoners in such numbers that the cages could no longer contain them. The battle had passed into a rout, and a rout on a scale never before witnessed. It outdid Sedan twice over.

For absolutely the enemy front had fallen to pieces. Eastward the Tagliamento was reached and passed; to the north Feltre and Belluno were in Italian hands; westward the Italian troops were at Trent. And on that wing in struggling to get out of the mountains the Austrians lost everything; the British 48th Division, as its proportion, collected 500 guns. In the crossing of the Tagliamento on November 4 the 332nd American Regiment, which had joined the 10th army, had a smart engagement with the hostile rearguard. It was their first time in action, but they fought with conspicuous dash and complete success.

The end, however, was now near. Propositions had come in from the Austrian Headquarters for an armistice. It was agreed that what was still left of the enemy forces should lay down their arms. There was indeed no alternative. A routed hostile army south of the Alps, and dependent for safety on crossing them, is doomed. In the Austrian Headquarters that patent fact was recognised. At 3.30 p.m. on November 4 the armistice took effect. The military power of Austria had ceased to exist. Everything had been staked, and everything lost. The dominion of a thousand years was dissolved.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE END IN MESOPOTAMIA

Stubborn character of the Mesopotamian struggle—Results of British administration and reforms—Effect on the Campaign—Operations on the Persian border—Advance to Hit and defeat of the Turks at Khan Bagdadiya—Enemy attempts to cut communications with Persia—Battle at Tuz Kermatli—The Expedition to Baku—Political reasons for it—Operations on the route to the Caspian—Military failure of the Baku Government—Landing of the British Relief Force—The siege of Baku and the British evacuation—Preparations for advance to Mosul—Turkish defences on the Tigris—General Marshall's plan—Success of the British movements—Turkish retreat from Fatha—The battle at Kalaat Shergat—The Turkish VIth Army surrounded—Futile efforts to break out, and capitulation of the hostile forces—The March to Mosul—Success of the Mesopotamia operations—Lessons of the Eastern and Colonial Campaigns.

IN Mesopotamia, where the last stroke against enemy power in the East was delivered, the war proved stubborn to the close. Not even momentarily had German-Turkish fortunes recovered from the blows dealt by General Sir Stanley Maude. That remarkable man, whose genius had been dislosed by difficulties, who had taken over the work when British prospects seemed at their lowest, and had been rewarded by shining and solid success, slept his last sleep in the burial ground outside the northern gate of Bagdad. But if ever it was thought at Constantinople that this loss would help to retrieve tottering German-Turkish fortunes, no hope was ever more consistently disappointed. In General Sir W. R. Marshall there instantly stepped into the place of Maude a successor cast in the same mould, and the work Maude had left incomplete went on along the same

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lines, as uninterrupted, and as thoroughly, as though there had been no change in the directing hand. In making their bid for world-power the Germans in regard to the States of British origin at all events, and whether working openly by a challenge to arms, or secretly by bribery and intrigue, had radically misjudged their task. It was no conflict with a leader here and there who in politics or in war might or might not prove to be of the first capacity ; it was essentially a conflict with a great class or body of men inheriting the capacity for and formed by practice in handling affairs ; animated by a common spirit ; possessing the true ability to influence and command ; lifted by their traditions above cruelty and meanness. The Germans were studious, laborious and persistent, but they were also greedy, false, and arrogant. In breaking the banks of this reservoir of British and later of American character they let loose a flood which overwhelmed them.

Sullenly, therefore, animated and leavened by his German associates, always the bitterest element of the opposition, the Turk, despite steady reverses, contested the territory, as he fell back, mile by mile. And wherever the chance seemed to offer he was pushed into a rebound. The influences which in other theatres of hostilities at the end of 1917 and during the earlier months of 1918 spurred the German Government to its final effort were, according to their degree, not less felt in Mesopotamia. The Turkish forces there were reinforced, and the belief in a British breakdown seems to have been held to the last. Both on the Tigris and on the Persian border the Turkish troops were held ready for a spring ; and they were held ready equally to move down the Euphrates whenever and as soon as ever prospects on the spot or elsewhere justified resumption of the offensive. In the meantime, there were activities designed to wear down the British Force.

What apparently was not understood at Constantinople was the change which had been taking place in the British rear. When the first British troops landed below Basra in the autumn of 1914 they entered a

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country to all intents without roads ; and save in rare and isolated spots a desolation ; a region, too, where the security of settled government had from beyond memory been unknown, and where the very name of authority was loathed as the synonym of evil. In the intervening three years the country had been silently though rapidly transformed. The great canals connecting the Tigris and the Euphrates had been bridged, seventy-five of such bridges having been built in the more inland area alone ; an Irrigation Department had been set up, and besides dealing with the scourge of floods, was at work saving and utilising the surplus water, draining marshes, and restoring fertility ; there was an Agricultural Department which had supplied the natives with hundreds of tons of seed corn, and had brought wide tracts again under cultivation ; native industries such as the production of lime and bitumen, and the utilisation of reeds for making mats and other purposes—industries which had long been dying or dead,—had sprung once more into active life ; steamers and craft navigated the Tigris to and from Bagdad and the Lower Euphrates as regularly and securely as in times of peace—a new phenomenon, adding to the prosperity of every riveraine town and village ; Basra, formerly a wretched little place where scarcely a corvel could have discharged a cargo, was now a fast expanding and flourishing port with two miles of broad quay, and wharves, warehouses and docks ; a railway had been begun to Bagdad, was rapidly being completed, and in December, 1917, was opened ; and there was a regular postal and telegraph service. It was, in short, as if a breath of life had been breathed into dry bones, checking disease, and banishing want and misery. There was food to eat, and water fit to drink, and every man could eat the bread of labour safe from harm.

Upon the actual operations of war the effect of these changes was fundamental. Formerly, 500 miles inland, the British troops had been in a situation surrounded with risks. Every ounce of supplies had to be brought oversea, and then with difficulty and delay moved in-

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land. Now much that was needed could be obtained on the spot, and while payment for it enriched the country, obtaining it on the spot saved public money. Uncertainty as to whether material or supplies would arrive in time or arrive at all had vanished. In the sense of time lost to no purpose, delay had been squeezed out of the reckoning. The British base was better served at Bagdad than it had formerly been at Basra. So far as the consistently successful conduct of operations was concerned, this was the heart of the matter. On discovering that there was food in the country the Germans became competitors for its purchase, encouraging smuggling by offers of high pay, and a blockade had to be established.

One of the last measures of General Maude had been to obtain command of the Diala gorge so as to protect from damage the headworks of the canals fed from the Diala, for upon these canals the country just round Bagdad depends for cultivation. The Diala flows into the great plain through this defile of the Jebel Himrin hills. But while events there were in progress, the enemy, who had all along stuck tenaciously to his positions on the Persian border, in order to relieve the pressure against them, re-acted down the Tigris. The result was a British move upon and the capture of Tekrit. Together with the occupation of Ramadie the further advance up the Tigris to Tekrit left the field clear for dealing with the 13th Turkish Army Corps distributed along the eastern hills.

To that quarter General Marshall turned his attention accordingly. His object was to master the passes. A feature of the geography of the country both here on the east and north towards Armenia is its fall in successive broad terrace-like levels. Persia and Armenia alike are high plateaux. The terraces which divide them from the low and level expanse of Mesopotamia are not flat, however, but ruggedly scored and ridged. To all intents the riveraine plain had now been cleared, but these foothills and uplands to the east and north afforded a position easy to defend yet by no means easy to attack. And

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the enemy within his means had laid himself out to make the most of the situation. The only way to counter his tactics was to defeat him in detail. The Jebel Himrin ridge was on the east, what may be called terrace Number 1. On the far side of it, at the foot of terrace Number 2, was Kifri, the advanced base of the 13th Turkish Army Corps, and following the foot of the higher terrace a road ran to Kirkuk, and from that place to Mosul. This road was the link between the hostile forces.

In an attack intended to block up the exits from the lower terrace to the plain, the probabilities always were that enemy reinforcements would move upon Kifri from Kirkuk. But the lower terrace between those two points is scored by the valley of the Adhaim, and consequently to draw attention to that quarter a Mounted Column, Major-General L. C. Jones in command, was sent to demonstrate along the defile. The real attack, however, was made under the command of General Sir R. Egerton, partly through the Diala gorge, partly along the backbone of the Jebel Himrin ridge. It resulted in the capture of the Sakaltutan pass. That secured, the troops pushed on to Kifri, and fearing to be trapped there, for they had either to retreat towards Kirkuk or else into the mountains, the Germans and Turks abandoned the town. They had previously made a stand at Kara Tepe and had been badly beaten.

They were reported next to be reinforcing on the Euphrates, where they had crept down again to Hit, thirty miles above Ramadie. This was much too near to be desirable, and therefore a push in that direction was determined upon. The drive turned out a very clean-cut affair. To bring it off, Major-General Sir H. T. Brooking, in command at Ramadie, was reinforced by a cavalry brigade, and the Light Armoured Car Detachment. He pushed the enemy out of Hit, and on to Khan Bagdadiya, a further twenty miles up-stream. There the opposing force, the 50th Turkish Division, entrenched. It was now resolved if possible to cut them off. The cavalry (Brigadier-General R. A. Cassels) had



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moved on by a detour, keeping well away from the river, until they struck the Wadi Hauran, and rode down it to the point where it joins the Euphrates. They then posted themselves along the farther side of the depression. The road or track along which the enemy had to retreat follows the Euphrates, and consequently crosses this hollow. Out of the position at Khan Bagdadiya the Turks had been ousted at about five in the afternoon (February 19, 1918), and they were marching at full speed, the British main body following them up, when late at night they came across this obstruction. There was, of course, a desperate attempt to break through, but it did not succeed, and the fight was still going on when the British in the rear closed in. Then the retreat became a rout. The hostile force broke up. Part was captured, part got away, and after this fragment there ensued a chase kept up by the cavalry and the armoured cars for seventy-three miles until the last were run down. There were taken 213 officers and 5,022 N.C.O.'s and rank and file, both Turks and Germans. The prisoners included the Turkish commander and his staff. All the guns and other equipment and stores of the division fell into the hands of the attacking troops. Besides that, dumps of ammunition at Haditha and Ana, as well as the Turkish detachments at those places, were disposed of. These operations cleared the line of the Euphrates for nearly 100 miles above Ramadie.

Apart from the mere clearance there attached to this hostile reverse a consequence of some value. Worst of in the field, the Germans had set afoot efforts to stir up the Arab tribesmen along the middle and lower Euphrates. Not very successful, the attempts were nipped by the fate which had overtaken the 50th Division, for evidently that Corps had been pushed down the river in order to exploit anticipated troubles. The connecting link was thus snapped. Also on the Persian border like means were resorted to. There are individuals all over the world prepared to become enthusiasts for a consideration, and some Persian hillmen were readily enough enlisted on that footing.

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The idea was to embarrass British communications with Persia, for General Marshall had occupied the Khanikin pass. And this idea was inspired by the Russian tumble down in the Caucasus, and the Turkish advance there at this time taking place. One of the prizes of the war, the Baku oil-fields, had dropped, as it were, into the German-Turkish maw of its own accord, like a ripe fruit. Turkish fortunes in Persia had undergone ups and downs. The Turk was not loved in Persia any more than the Russian, for both had levied requisitions upon the country and between them picked it to the bone. Nevertheless, it was evidently hoped in April, 1918, if the British forces in Mesopotamia could be barred out, that the German-Turkish project of annexing Persia might again be set upon its legs. On the Western front in France the Germans were, or professed to be just then, in high hopes, and the repercussion of that state of things made itself felt, as already seen, in Syria, and all through Asia Minor. After all, the war was one war and not half a dozen.

In view of activities on the Euphrates General Marshall had, perhaps advisedly, withdrawn from Kifri, contenting himself with the mastery of the nearer defiles. But in the circumstances the enemy, as soon as the position seemed safe, had come back again, and though he could not move as far as the Khanikin pass himself, he was prepared to lay out enough to ensure that the pass should not be a safe road. Politically, at any rate, it was judged advisable both to keep the road into Persia open and to embarrass the Turkish march towards Baku. Each of those considerations now went to shape events in Mesopotamia.

As regards the road into Persia, the measures taken were two. First, the pro-German hillmen, the Sinjabis, were opposed and, a small British column of all arms assisting, defeated by the Guran confederation of hillmen, who were pro-Ally. Next, it was decided finally to remove the enemy out of Kifri. The plan for removal was not a direct attack, but an operation against the hostile position at Tuz Kermatli. That place is on

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the road from Kifri to Kirkuk, and of course if it were seized Kifri went with it. And as Tuz Kermatli could be approached up the valley of the Adhaim, the plan was for a feint against Kifri so that the real striking force, under the command of General Sir W. Cayley, might get well home.

These dispositions so far had the effect intended, that the enemy, evacuating Kifri, took up a position at Kulawand on the road to Tuz Kermatli and about seven miles off to the south. Tuz Kermatli itself had been strongly fortified. Its Turkish garrison was now reinforced from Kirkuk. Between the two points, however, the 6th Cavalry Brigade (Brigadier-General Holland-Pryor) after a stiff night ride placed themselves across the road, and then charged into the Kulawand force (two battalions) and broke it up, taking a considerable haul of prisoners. At Tuz Kermatli, when the position was assailed on April 29, the Turks fought well. The defences were laid out on both banks of the Ak river. Driven out of those on the south bank early in the action, the garrison held out on the north bank where the village is situated, but the main defences here were stormed by a brigade of Lancashire infantry (the 38th) and of the enemy survivors 1,300 laid down their arms. Some others fled into the hills, chased by the cavalry and cyclists, and together with the transport were rounded up. Adding the captures made by the 6th Cavalry Brigade and others the total of prisoners was over 3,000. The other hostile losses were proportionate. It was the finish of the Turkish 13th Corps.

Practically these operations, carried out by Lieut.-General Egerton, cleared the Persian border as far as Kirkuk, and on political grounds an advance upon Kirkuk was now judged advisable because of the effect it was likely to exercise on enemy doings in the Caucasus. It was therefore, on instructions, made as soon as possible. There proved to be no opposition. The town was entered on May 8. The occupation, however, was brought to an end three weeks later. Kirkuk was a position 130 miles from railhead, and the Expeditionary

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Force in Mesopotamia, in addition to its own work in the country and the duties of the campaign, had had imposed upon it the business of relieving distress in Persia, and of taking part in the occupation of Baku.

In that centre a Bolshevik Government had been set up, but as in the like circumstances elsewhere, there was much more talk than action. Certainly no effective opposition to a Turkish attack was likely to be forthcoming. The last of the Russian troops were now evacuating Persia, a mob of no sort of military value, but leaving behind them a state of famine. The demand upon the Mesopotamian Force was to aid the Persian Relief Mission of Major-General Dunsterville, as to which it may be said that it went far in mitigating the worst distress. Unfortunately and inevitably, the demand involved a heavy draft upon the Mesopotamia transport, and of course the transport could not be so employed and engaged against the Turkish troops at the same time. In fact, but for the administrative reforms in Mesopotamia the work would have been impossible.

Besides humanitarian considerations, however, the matter was complicated by political cross-currents. A fear was at any rate professed about the "road to India." Just at this date (June, 1918) the disposition fostered alike by the successes in Mesopotamia and by the habit of studying the terrain on small maps, arose to stretch the Mesopotamian Force out north as a sort of barrier, notwithstanding that the distance from Bagdad to the Caspian is 700 miles. This was a very wide gate to close, yet where material means reached their limit, moral effect, it was supposed, would round off the miracle.

Considered simply as a military movement, the "push" to Baku cannot be justified from any standpoint. If there were a German victory on the West, as some at this date apprehended, then there would have been a revival of Turkish fortunes—and a British contingent at Baku would in that event not only have been cut off, but as an obstacle futile, and the diversion would merely have jeopardised the situation in Mesopotamia. On the

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other hand, if there were a German reverse on the West the Turks would be left all the more to struggle single-handed with their difficulties. Rather hastily, the conclusion was accepted that an advance into the Caucasus was for the Turks a great accession of advantage. It was the exact contrary. It meant a fresh draft upon their dwindling forces. Nor, those forces being at this time what they were, was it in the least feasible for them to exploit the "road to India" across a Persia in a state of famine. In short, affairs here in the East were strictly subordinate to the turn affairs might take on the West, and consequently the expedition to Baku was, as a military movement, a dispersal of strength, useless if there were adversity, superfluous if there were not.

On the other hand, the movement assisted to delay a hostile occupation of Baku for two months, that is until the middle of September. Possibly enough, though the point is one not easy to estimate, that delay, cutting the enemy off from this great source of oil supply, was a bad embarrassment, for in the middle of September the war was very near its close, and it is at least doubtful if between then and November the oil supply was drawn upon save to a very limited extent.

The last of the Russian forces left in Persia was a kind of rearguard of some 1,200 men still retaining some semblance of military discipline, and under the command of Colonel Bicherakoff, who appeared to be pro-Ally. The project was to send these troops to Baku, and to add to them for the purpose of reaching the Caspian and keeping the route open a battalion of the Hampshire regiment, a battalion of Gurkhas, and the Armoured Car Brigade. With the assistance of the Baku population the Russian column should, it was thought, suffice to hold the town and port. The Russians were to embark at Enzeli on the Caspian and reach Baku by sea.

To arrive at Enzeli, however, a long, very difficult, very rugged and very bad road had to be traversed. It not only crossed several lofty passes, one of them



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7,000 feet above sea-level, but several deep rivers. In the course of the border fighting between Russians and Turks, the bridges had been broken down. This district, too, of north-western Persia was for the same reason one of those scourged by famine, and whatever food the column needed had to be taken with it, or sent after it. That state of affairs naturally encouraged raiding, and the Germans had not, when the British force was ascertained to be on its way from Bagdad, neglected to prepare a blockade. British official secrecy notwithstanding, the purpose of the expedition had been readily guessed. German officers, sufficiently provided with money and yet more liberal in promises had therefore been sent among the hill tribes inhabiting the range just south of the Caspian, and when the mixed Russian and British column got to the loftiest and most rugged part of the route, one of these tribes, the Jangalis, was found in arms with German officers at their head. At the crossing of the river Mandjil a battle was fought, and the opposition defeated. To keep open the pass a British detachment was left at Miane, and another at the town of Resht, between the mountains and Enzeli. Some time later the Jangalis again collected, and not content with raids upon convoys, attacked Resht. As, however, this was an action at close quarters—there was hand to hand fighting in the streets—the Hampshires and Gurkhas trounced the Jangalis so thoroughly that they retired from the business, and entered into a compact of good behaviour.

At Baku, in the meantime, Bicherakoff and his Russian following had on arrival been by the local Soviet doubtfully received. Bicherakoff was appointed commander-in-chief of what was grandiloquently named the "Red Army of the Caucasus," but the army for all effective purposes were his 1,200 men. When towards the end of July the Turks closed in and the rabble of the Red Army had been routed in one skirmish after another, for every semblance of organisation was lacking, a popular rising pulled down the Soviet and set up a Dictator. The Dictator and Bicherakoff failed to agree,

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and the colonel, giving the government of Baku up as hopeless, took himself and his contingent off to Derbend.

Then the new Baku Government applied for British aid. Before it was given a group of British officers with a platoon as escort were sent from Enzeli to report. They landed at Baku on August 4, and were greeted by the population with extraordinary enthusiasm. By now the Turks were around the town and had entered upon a regular siege. The first effort was to rush the place by assault, but as it coincided with the wave of encouragement, the Baku levies for once fought respectably, and the attack was beaten. For the enemy this was a surprise, and he set about bringing up more forces. While he was thus occupied a British brigade and some armoured cars were thrown into the town, General Dunsterville being assigned the command. The troops were battalions of the North Staffords, the Royal Warwicks and the Worcesters, though owing to the length and character of the line of communications with Mesopotamia they could only arrive by dribblets. Unfortunately, as was the case with Bicherakoff, the Government of Baku left the burden of the defence to be borne by this comparative handful, notwithstanding that the brigade were outnumbered by the besieging forces five times over. And the enemy was not long in finding out the situation. The weak point of the defence was its patchiness. The British troops were not nearly numerous enough to go round all the defences, and elsewhere the resistance was not to be relied upon. As soon as the hostile reinforcements arrived, a succession of assaults began. From the beginning to the middle of September they were not successful. The Turks met with severe casualties, and their only gain had been an advanced position which a British company had been obliged to evacuate after a bayonet fight against heavy odds.

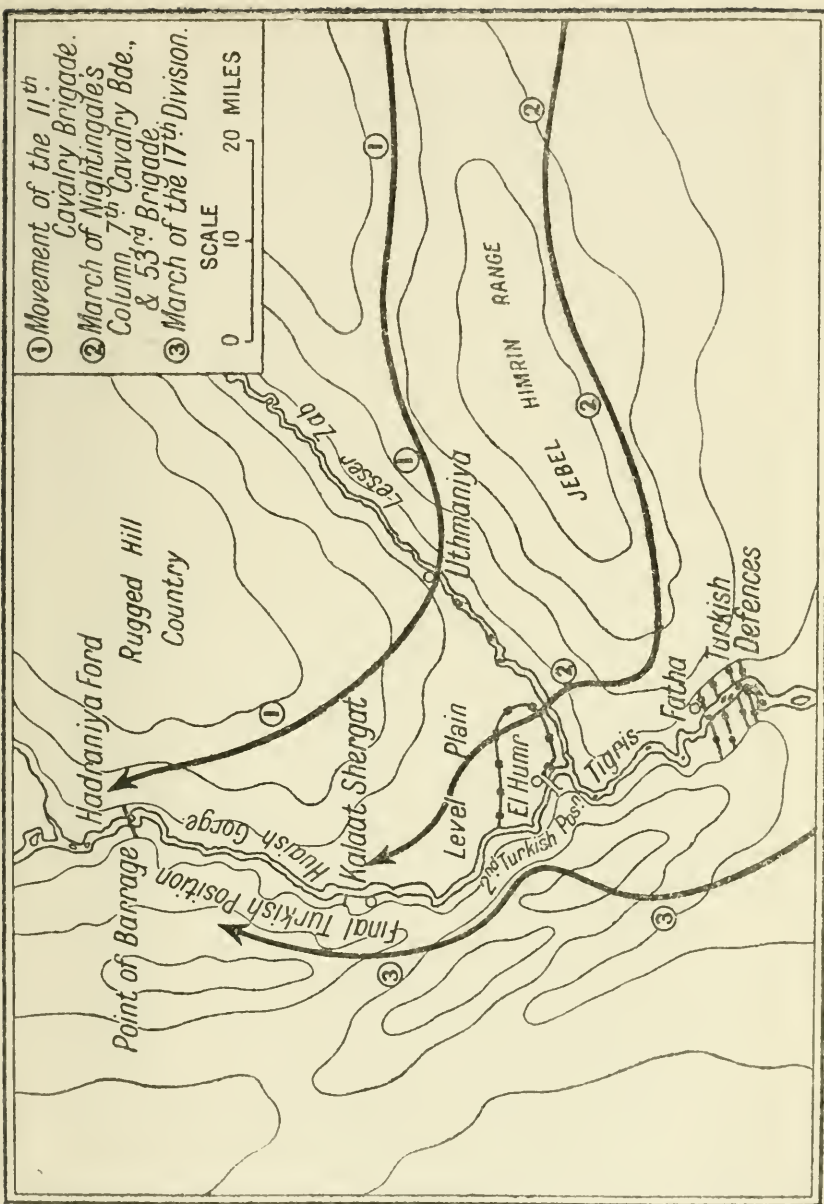
But yet more and important enemy reinforcements arrived, and on September 14 the outer defences where they were held by Armenian battalions were breached. The defence was now forced back upon the last ridge,

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which commanded both the town and the harbour. A counter-attack was attempted. It failed. But in turn the Turks, closing in, could make no impression. From daybreak until four in the afternoon they pushed forward one assault after another. One after another, however, the assaults were shot to pieces, and the armoured cars, boldly dashing out after the defeated and disordered infantry, put the last touches upon the discomfiture. Under a heavy shell-fire the British troops had held on, and they had fought the Turks to a standstill. Undoubtedly if at this juncture there had been a counter-attack the enemy must have suffered a signal reverse. But looking at what the Baku levies were and the exhaustion of the remainder of the British force, it was out of the question. The only course was to take advantage of the breathing space to evacuate. As rapidly as possible, therefore, that was done. First of all, the wounded and sick were carried on to the transports. The troops and guns were next embarked. By ten at night all were aboard, and the ships left the harbour without lights. All the four steamers arrived safely at Enzeli.

Such was the episode of Baku. As the Turkish forces were wearing thin, and as it was certain that after the capture of Baku, troops would be brought back from the Caucasus, an offensive movement in Mesopotamia in conjunction with that in Syria had plainly become advisable. The orders received by General Marshall were to advance to Mosul.

Of the two routes, that along the Tigris and that by way of Kirkuk, the latter was to be preferred, because, though it crossed successive ranges of hills and lay across Kurdistan, it would turn the main Turkish defences. Those were now astride the Tigris, and on the line dividing the alluvial river plain from the north highlands. The Tigris issues from the hills of Fatha, some thirty-five miles above Tekrit, and it there flows through a gorge about ten miles in length. Beyond this gorge there is another level alluvial expanse triangular in shape, and marking the confluence of the Tigris with



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the Lesser Zab river. South to north, the level expanse is thirty miles or thereabouts. Beyond it again to the north the Tigris makes its way through a second gorge, and this defile is eleven miles in length. At the southern entrance is the village of Kalaat Shergat. From Kalaat Shergat south to Fatha, forty miles, the country on the west side of the Tigris is rugged.

At Fatha the Turks and Germans had laid out an elaborate position. It could not be turned by attack to right or left because the contiguous hills on either side were unassailable in force, and what nearer limited ascents there were had been carefully barred. In fact, so far as defence works went, the Fatha position was a fortress of the first class. And at the northern end of the Fatha gorge at the confluence of the Tigris and the Lesser Zab there was a second fortified position; on the west bank of the Tigris a series of works along the arc of heights there overhanging the river, and across the level on the east bank—the entrance to the Fatha gorge being one of the points of the triangle of plain—lines of trenches obstructing approach to and the crossing of the tributary stream. These works, as well as the defences at Fatha, were held by the VIth Turkish Army, formed of the 2nd and 14th Divisions, and to reinforce them the 5th Division was being moved south from Urmia. Their commander was Ismail Hakki Pasha, a General noted for personal bravery and resolution. He had been one of the most resolute defenders of Kut. The strength of the 2nd and 14th Divisions was estimated at 9,000 rifles and 59 guns.

In these circumstances, without doubt the better course on the British side would have been a move upon Mosul through Kirkuk, but the needed transport having been dispersed in Persia, that move could not be made, and knowing very well that it could not, the enemy not troubling himself about the Kirkuk route, beyond leaving a force to watch it, had massed at Fatha. And there in perfect confidence he awaited the British onset.

The troops General Marshall assigned for the contemplated operations were the 17th Division (Major-



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General Leslie), the 18th Division (Major-General Fanshawe), the 7th Cavalry Brigade (Brigadier-General Norton), the 11th Cavalry Brigade (Brigadier-General Cassels), a small, mobile column detached from the IIIrd Army Corps, and now placed under the command of Brigadier-General A. C. Lewin, and the Armoured Car Batteries (Lieut.-Col. Sir T. R. L. Thompson). The execution of the attack was entrusted to Lieut.-General Sir A. S. Cobbe, V.C., commanding the 1st Army Corps.

The plan was not a direct attack upon the Fatha defences. That would have been both doubtful and expensive. The plan was at one and the same time to turn the Fatha defences and the second fortified position by an attack in the first instance on the east side of the Tigris. In that part of the Jebel Himrin range of hills which lies between the Adhaim valley and the Tigris at Fatha, a distance of sixty miles, two openings had been found. They were very second rate, to put it mildly, and there was no water supply, but they are solitary, and being remote from observation, they could be improved and wells dug. And that was done without giving the enemy the alarm. He had no troops nearer than Taza Kurmatli, forty miles distant.

The means therefore existed for moving lightly equipped forces on to the heights.

The movements designed, taking them from the British right (east) to the British left (west) were these :—

Lewin was to march to Taza Kermatli and Kirkuk, leading the enemy to suppose that an advance was to take place in that direction, and preventing the Turkish force there from coming to the assistance of the main body.

Cassels with the 11th Cavalry Brigade was to push up on to the Jebel Himrin by the more easterly of the two discovered defiles, and striking across the range to ford the Lesser Zab and turn the second defensive position.

Norton's Cavalry were to move up into the hills by the more westerly of the two discovered defiles, cross the range, and then strike along the triangular level towards the northern outlet of the Fatha gorge.

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By the same ascent a column under the command of Brigadier-General Nightingale, was to go up, and wheeling to left push along the summit towards the Fatha gorge, thus threatening to obstruct it by an attack in flank.

The 18th Division was to demonstrate in front of the Fatha defences, and, when the enemy evacuated, to follow him.

The 17th Division, west of the Tigris, when the enemy moved, were to march into the hills there and maintain a pressure, barring at the same time any break-out westward.

Thompson with the Armoured Cars was directed upon El Hadr, sixty miles west of Kalaat Shergat, with orders to strike eastward and cut the road to Mosul, obstructing the movement of hostile reinforcements.

This plan economised transport, which had had to be scrapped up from all quarters, and it avoided the risk of a frontal attack with infantry, which now consisted mostly of newly-embodied British Indian troops for the first time in action. With few exceptions, the veterans, like those in Syria, had been withdrawn for service in France, or sent to Baku. The last withdrawal of 3,500 men had only just taken place.

Movement was initiated on October 23.

Lewin marched to Taza Kermatli, and then on to Kirkuk, which after encountering and defeating the opposition, he occupied on October 25.

The cavalry of General Cassels crossed the Jebel Himrin ridge and at the end of a ride of forty-five miles across an arid, stony, and totally lonely tract, descended in the afternoon of October 24 into the valley of the Zab towards a ford which had been reported close to the village of Uthmaniya. On the farther bank was a strong detachment of the enemy, and the ford proved to be deep. But Cassels had already shown himself an enterprising commander, and the passage was boldly forced, and mastered with very few losses.

The 7th Cavalry Brigade had also crossed the range, and reached the small plain on the farther side, and

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Nightingale's Column had struck west along the summit.

On discovering these movements, and realising what they portended, the Turkish main body at Fatha made haste to get out. They stole out from their defences, and began the retreat along the gorge during the night of October 23. There were roads through the gorge on both banks of the river, but in places the cliffs and the stream were so close that the roadway had to be carried on an embankment, or through a gallery cut in the rock. In order to evade pursuit, some of these points, though not all, were blown up, and the debris of the embankment tumbled into the water.

This prompt retreat enabled the enemy safely to get out of the Fatha gorge, and to occupy his defences at the confluence of the Tigris and the Lesser Zab. Following him up through the defile was not easy. The roads had to be repaired, or in places a new way cut by blasting through the cliffs, and to facilitate the use of both roads a pontoon bridge had to be thrown over the Tigris at Fatha.

So far it looked evens all, but the 11th Cavalry Brigade was over the Lesser Zab, which, despite its name, is a wide and deep river, and on October 25 the 7th Cavalry Brigade and the 53rd Brigade of Infantry, part of the 18th Division, forced another passage near the confluence, a feat all the more remarkable because it was executed in the face of a brisk shell-fire. After that, the enemy troops on the east bank of the Tigris crossed to the west bank, where, as already stated, the ground is hilly. The Turks and Germans had thus only the road on that side for the purpose of retreat. At this crossing just behind their defences there was at El Humr a bridge, which of course they broke. But behind them the 17th Division had all this while been pushing into the western uplands, fighting back the hostile flank guards. These uplands were without roads, fissured by deep ravines, and with no ways over them save goat tracks. Wheeled transport was an impossibility. Everything had to be carried or loaded on to the pack mules. Water, too,

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was scarce, and the heat scorching. The severest labour was getting along the guns, and especially the heavies. The troops had to assist in the haulage. Nevertheless, on the evening of October 25 the Division was in front of the defences covering the Turkish position on the west, and the advanced works, though wired in, were rushed by a charge of the 1st Highland Light Infantry. The attack was continued next day.

But there were other developments. News having come in that there was a fordable crossing of the Tigris at Hadraniya, fourteen miles above Kalaat Shergat, the 11th Cavalry Brigade was ordered there from Uthmaniya, and moving through the hills by a detour so that the manœuvre might remain undetected, reached the ford and secured it without opposition. It was at a point where the river is wide, and divided into three channels, but it was practicable for mounted men.

The Brigade having crossed, rode south to the entrance of the gorge above Kalaat Shergat. This point was five miles below the ford. Here, too, no resistance was met with.

While the move of the 11th Brigade was being carried out, the 7th had made for Kalaat Shergat, which manœuvre both masked the movement of Cassels' men, and caused the enemy to extend up stream.

On October 27 and on October 28 the fighting in the hills between the enemy and the 17th Division had gone on, but coincidentally the 53rd Infantry Brigade had been sent to join Cassels' cavalry at the outlet of the Huwaish gorge, and arrived after a march of thirty-three miles. The Armoured Cars had also arrived from the north, after cutting the wires to Mosul.

In the attack of October 28 the 17th Division had carried the enemy's last defences and obliged him to move on. He moved to the west side of the Huwaish gorge where the cliffs are broken by a number of steep gullies, and in these he established himself. They were bombarded by the British artillery from the east bank as well as attacked by the airmen.

Run to earth in the gullies, Ismail Hakki Pasha found

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himself surrounded. On one side of him, east of the Tigris, was the 18th British Division; on the other side, west of the Tigris, were the 17th Division; ahead the road through the Huwaish gorge was barred by Cassels' cavalry and the 53rd Infantry Brigade.

Now began the first attempts to break out, helped by the 5th Turkish Division moving down stream from Mosul. To strengthen the obstructing force, the 7th Cavalry Brigade was sent up, and joined the 11th.

The 7th Brigade encountered the 5th Turkish Division at the Hadraniya ford, defeated it, and took over 1,000 prisoners and some guns.

More efforts were made by the hostile main force to break out through the gorge, but all were repulsed.

Exhausted though they were by the heavy work which had been imposed upon them since October 23, the troops of the 17th Division were called upon for a further and final effort. The attack west of the river was renewed. The enemy, completely entrapped, fought stubbornly. His entrenchments had only been hastily thrown up, and his rearguard had been driven in, but all through October 29 the last defences were clung to, and late in the day a heavy counter-attack was thrown forward. To defeat the 17th Division was now the one means of escape. The counter-attack, however, was beaten back, and with severe losses. The fighting went on through the night, and only in the early morning was there a brief pause. At daybreak the British bombardment reopened, and the troops were in readiness to leave their trenches, when white flags were hoisted over the Turkish lines. Ismail Hakki had done his utmost. He went in person to the British Headquarters and concluded the capitulation—an unconditional surrender.

The prisoners numbered 11,322; the captures of equipment 51 pieces of artillery, 130 machine-guns, large quantities of ammunition, a bridging outfit, and two paddle steamers.

The battle, a most interesting example of skilful combination, had led to this sweeping victory because



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every part of the British force had proved equally dependable.

Meanwhile, General Lewin, heading off the troops opposed to him, had marched from Kirkuk to Altun Keupri, and the way to Mosul was open. The two brigades of cavalry and the 54th Brigade of Infantry were formed into a column, and sent on under the command of General Fanshawe. They were at Hamman Ali, twelve miles south of Mosul when (November 1) the Turkish commander, Ali Ibsan, sent information of the armistice. As a precaution Mosul was occupied, and as Ali Ibsan seemed inclined to give trouble, what remained of his troops had to be cleared out of the Mosul vilayet.

On the Euphrates the British advance had been pushed to sixty miles above Ana. The campaign in Mesopotamia was at an end. Its purposes had been fully achieved.

Baku, which as one of the terms of surrender the Turks had agreed to evacuate as well as the whole of the Russian Caucasus, was reoccupied on November 17 by a combined British and Russian force.

There is one feature which all the campaigns related in these pages have in common. They show the necessity of adhering to the principles of the military art proved by experience to be sound. In that respect the Great War was not only not different from preceding and lesser wars; its moral is but emphasised by its magnitude. Wherever the record is chequered by momentary failure these shadows arose not from what are called the fortunes of war, but from an ignoring of principles which either dictated impossible tasks, or imposed impossible conditions. Great men, whether politicians or soldiers, know that when once the sword had been drawn the issue becomes at one and the same time simple and absolute. It is that of victory or defeat. And great men, knowing this, place all upon the cast for victory. Men who are something less than great cling to the political habit of compromise, and have an open ear for apparently facile devices. In war, mechan-

## THE END IN MESOPOTAMIA

ism is subordinate to valour, and the more perfect and refined the mechanism the more is superiority in valour enhanced. One of the most voiced political superstitions of this period was a contrary belief. Instinctively, however, and never more emphatically than during this tremendous conflict, the British people realised that the issue *was* absolute, and following, as they have always done, the policy of declining even to consider defeat as a possibility, resisted every effort to sap their *moral*. Such a policy, which makes a nation feared in war and secure in peace, is the rock upon which alone political grandeur can be reared.

The Eastern and Colonial campaigns have been thought minor fringes of the struggle. Yet looked at as a whole they present an imposing spectacle. Before this outbreak it would have been thought grave had two such campaigns been going on together, but including the operations on the North-west frontier of India and the Pacific Ocean Expeditions there were ten. Never certainly had a heavier demand been made upon national fortitude, and never had the glory of valour been more conspicuously vindicated. German designs were vast, and German designs were allowed to mature. The challenge served to reveal the Anglo-Saxon race to the world, and also to itself.



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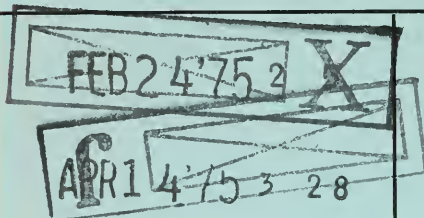
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